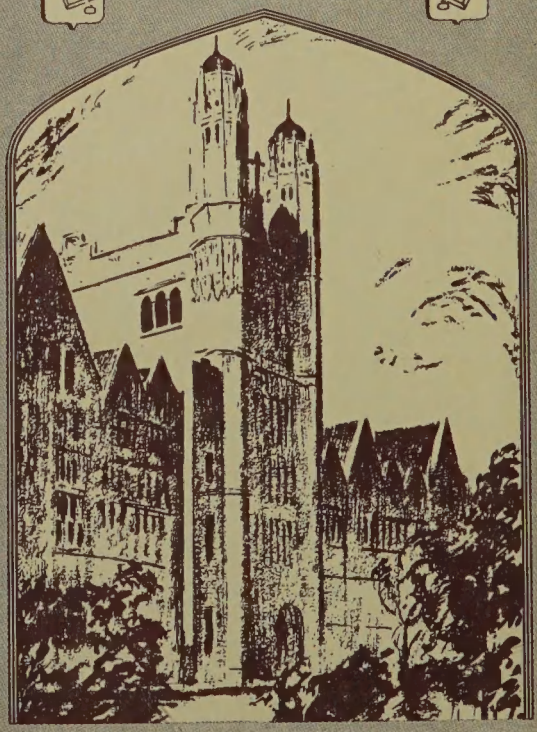

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SAINT THOMAS OF CANTERBURY

BY

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

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ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY

INTRODUCTION

THERE is hardly any character in history that rouses such feeling as the character of Saint Thomas of Canterbury. On one side there are those who say that he was a tiresome fanatic—a fanatic because he glorified Church against State, and tiresome because he did this with regard to a number of trifling details involving no particular principle. On the other side there is the verdict of the Catholic Church that he lived a saint and died a martyr.

Now it is perfectly natural, especially in these days, that there should be these two opinions, for there was scarcely ever a time when the State was more glorified at the expense of the Church. We are informed by thousands of voices that the State is the

true "Church," that citizenship is the whole duty of man, and that all interests that conflict with patriotism or the service of "Humanity" are contemptible and treacherous. This movement, in England at least, began in the sixteenth century, when the country was separated from allegiance to Rome, and religion itself became more or less a department of the State; it is reaching its maturity now in the position that the State is all, and that religion, if it is in any sense "established," must conform utterly to the will of its protector.

This view of the State has affected, as we know, even those who cling to Christianity. We have heard lately a chorus of English voices, from the throats of professing Christians, acclaiming recent events in France, and declaring that Pius X, through his self-assertive mediaevalism, is the sole cause of his own troubles. If he had only recognised the sanctity of the State and allowed his spiritual children to conform to its requirements in the matter of appeals and associations, all this anti-clericalism would have disappeared long ago!

Now here is almost the precise quarrel in which Thomas laid down his life. If Erastianism is right, certainly Saint Thomas was wrong. If it is proper that Edward VII should be even the nominal head—and by law he is much more—of an institution claiming to be Christ's Church; and that M. Fallières should be the ultimate arbitrator between French priests and people; then it was equally proper for Henry II to insist upon the "Constitutions of Clarendon" and the "royal customs," and highly improper, as well as absurd, for St. Thomas to resist them. Certainly some of these constitutions and customs seem very trifling matters if they are judged by worldly standards.

But Catholics believe that Christ's Kingdom is not of this world, and therefore cannot possibly, in the matter of her own constitution, be subject to secular control. They can no more, in the things of ecclesiastical government, consent to the substitution of appeals to a Privy Council, or any secular court, for appeals to the Holy Father, than they can consent to the supplanting of the Apostles' Creed by the syllabus of the

London County Council. These things are very far from being trifling details to those who are seriously convinced that Jesus Christ founded one Church, of which they themselves are members, a Church with a divinely appointed hierarchy and a divinely revealed system of belief. The opposite view is, of course, perfectly natural for those who believe nothing of the kind.

St. Thomas therefore will always stand as a symbol of the unceasing conflict between the world and the Church; and the fact that some of the principles for which he contended do appear even to some Catholics to be on the very borderline between "dogma" and "opinion," makes him all the more significant. It is one more illustration of his significance that it was he whom Henry VIII selected to attack, from all the saints of Catholic England, summoning him to appear, four centuries after his death, to answer to the charge of high-treason and disloyalty.

This then is what St. Thomas stands for —the principle of God against Caesar. It is in some matters extraordinarily difficult to

define where the line falls: no Christian would dispute that St. Peter was right in his defiance of Nero; no English Catholic would deny that it is his own duty to be an obedient subject of Edward VII. Yet somewhere between those respective duties comes a dividing line where the territories meet, and where a conscientious man is forced to choose on which side he will stand. It was on that difficult border that Thomas was called by God to live and die. He had been Chancellor; he became Archbishop. He began as an intimate friend of his King, he ended with death from his friend's hands: and the verdict of the Catholic Church, ratified as it was by God after the Saint's death, has stood ever since to the effect that Thomas chose rightly, and died in loyalty to the King of kings. With the reasonableness of this verdict it is difficult to see how any man can disagree who has even the faintest conception of what Catholics believe as to the rights of God. Men may say that Thomas' whole attitude—as well as that of the Church—was wrong from beginning to end, but it is impossible to call him a stickler

or a trifler. If the Church's position is granted, Thomas' position is assured. He did not die for trifles, but for principles that were and are vital to her life of whom he was a devoted servant.

The principal authorities for the life and passion of St. Thomas are the various biographies, written for the most part by his personal acquaintances, and collected in six volumes in the "Rolls series." Besides these I have consulted freely many other biographies and histories, such as the Life by Canon Robertson, the Life by the Rev. J. A. Giles in its French translation introduced by Monseigneur Darboy, a sketch by Mr. Radford entitled "Thomas of London," and above all the well-known and admirable biography by Father John Morris, S.J. It is this last that I have chiefly followed as regards arrangement and presentation, since it would be a foolish attempt at originality to endeavour to improve upon it. I desire to express my gratitude to Mr. J. W. Clark, Registrar of the University of Cambridge, for kind advice and for the loan of several books bearing

upon Benedictine life and the topography of Canterbury. To those who wish further to pursue the history of the Saint, I venture to recommend for their reading first Father Morris' "Life," and then the "Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury," in the Rolls series referred to above.

I

BIRTH, YOUTH AND RISE

I

ON Tuesday, December 21st, in the year of our Lord 1118, there was born in London a male-child, to a couple named Gilbert and Matilda Beket; and was baptized the same evening by the name of Thomas, in honour of the Apostle and Martyr whose feast it was that day.

Among those who were friends of the family there must have been a certain excitement when it was known that Matilda Beket had been given a son by God, for there were strange stories told among the neighbours, as to certain dreams that the mother had dreamed a short while before. For example, she had thought in her sleep one night that the river Thames had flowed into her bosom; and, again, that the child that she was expecting had been with her in Canterbury, and had prevented her from

entering the Cathedral; and again that twelve bright stars had fallen from heaven into her lap. These dreams too, strange to say, continued after the child's birth; for she thought one night that she went to look at him in his cradle and found him sleeping beneath a blood-red quilt so huge that all England could not hold it.

These were the stories that the neighbours whispered among themselves as they stood together in the narrow London streets, or sat in the bitter winter over the fires within the dark low-ceilinged rooms.

The years went on and Thomas went to school. He was a lusty child, and his mother's custom of weighing him and giving to the poor so many pounds of bread as her son weighed, was indeed a generous mode of charity. His parents were not wealthy, since they had had great losses by fire; but they sent their son to the Augustinians at Merton Abbey to learn letters and good behaviour. He was a high-spirited boy, with a quick temper, devoted to outdoor sports; and, no doubt, school was the best place for him. Here he would learn

his grammar, sitting with the rest in some great draughty hall, under the eye of a priest; here too, when school was over he would play football in the meadow, and watch the great gentlemen go jingling by, hawk on wrist, with greyhounds in leash, and long to be one of them.

Time went on, and Thomas at last was allowed to go hawking himself. It was a fierce and exciting sport, and he learned to love it. Once, at any rate, in attempting to recover his hawk he either fell or rode into a deep and swift mill-stream in the country near Ware, and narrowly escaped drowning. But it was not only hawking that he learned; cock-fighting was allowed even at school itself; and in winter he learned to sledge and to skate, tying sheeps' thigh-bones to his feet and balancing with an iron-tipped pole, over the long pools by Westminster and the City.

It was a pleasant and a noble life in London at this time. The City, as an old chronicler says, was "happy in the healthiness of the air, in the Christian Religion, in the strength of its towers, the nature of its

site, the honour of its citizens, the modesty of its women; it was pleasant in its sports, and fruitful of high-spirited men." Thomas would take his part in looking at mystery-plays, boar-baiting in winter, tilting at a shield in boats at Easter-tide, and visiting the horse-fair at Smithfield on any Friday in the year.

Of his lessons not a great deal is known, since he certainly preferred hawking to arithmetic; yet for all that he had to learn it, with the rod never very far away; as well as grammar, Latin, rhetoric and a little theology. There were great days now and again, when a platform was erected in one of the vast churches of London, on which the boys disputed this point or that, in a kind of tournament, with their friends beneath, watching and listening, and applauding as eagerly as at the tilting on Sundays in Lent; and, more important than all in Thomas' eyes, in a chair of dignity beside the platform sat Prior Robert himself, the superior of Merton, and the boy's own head master whom he loved and reverenced with all his heart.

Then came the day when Thomas must leave school, which he did after a time in London, and go to the University; and to Paris he went, at his mother's expense. There he would find school again on a larger scale. There would be the same kind of lectures—but delivered by great men whose names were known throughout Europe—great scholars, theologians, philosophers, thundering out from their high desks upon the silent crowd of students—men who knew all that was to be known in those days of science and history and the arts. There too would be the same rough and tumble life—sleeping in crowded rooms giving and taking blows as well as sharp words—going in parties to see the sights—the sports, the executions, the ordeals by fire and water—meeting, not as before, boys of another school, but men of another country—brown-faced Italians, heavy, fair Germans, as well as the voluble Normans and silent Englishmen with whom Thomas would find himself at home. It was a rough life, with plenty of coarse temptations, but even here, according to one tradition, he was notorious

for his purity and simplicity. There is a hymn preserved in Rome to this day, upon the Seven Joys of Mary, which Thomas is said to have composed in Paris.[1] There too he learned more than ever before of what that

[1] *I venture to append a rough translation in the same rhythm as the original.*

Joy! Christ's Mother, who through hearing
Gabriel's message, nothing fearing,
As a Virgin, Christ conceived.

Joy! Who full of God, all painless
Then did bear Him, pure and stainless
As a lily-garland weaved.

Joy! Who whilst thy Son enfolding
Saw the Wise Men coming, holding
Gifts of great and precious price.

Joy! Who in thy search unwitting
Found thy Son mid doctors sitting
In the House of Sacrifice.

Joy! Who after dereliction
In thy great Son's resurrection
Saw the light of victory.

Joy! Who thy pure eyes upbending
Saw thy Son to heaven ascending
Mid all hallows' company.

Joy! Who after Him in splendour
Did ascend; to whom all render
Praise in heaven and jubilee.

Catholic Church was of whom he was a child —he would see for himself, as St. Paul had said more than a thousand years before, how that in her there was neither Jew nor Greek —nor Frenchman nor Englishman either— but that all were one in faith and hope; he would begin to understand here, for perhaps the first time in his life, that there is an obedience greater even than that due to king or country—an obedience to God as well as, and infinitely greater than, the obedience due to Caesar. And so he grew to manhood.

When Thomas was twenty-one years old he came back to London, and in the same year his mother died.

His twenty-second year he spent at home; and in 1141 he went to learn business habits in the house of Osbern Witdeniers his kinsman, where he remained for three years, working, it seems, to some extent in the offices of the city sheriffs of whom Osbern was one.

Now it is known well enough what Thomas looked like at this time. He was a tall, long-limbed lad—far above the average in height

—with an aquiline nose and very bright, large eyes. He had, too, extraordinarily quick senses; he could hear and see and smell at great distances. He was not in the least like the kind of colourless dummy of which foolish people think that a Catholic Saint and hero is made. On the contrary he was extremely fond of outdoor sports, and extremely competent at them. He loved too to dress well, and make a fine appearance. Of the kind of dress that he would wear we know quite enough to say that it would suit him. On his head he would wear a tight-fitting cap with a peak turned back; on his body a tunic of some brilliant colour; with a short full cloak or "curt-mantle" hanging from shoulder to below the waist; on his legs tight-fitting hose, and on his feet soft leather shoes, yellow or brown, turned up at the toes. Thomas would not, probably, be content with this; he would put a plume in his cap fixed by a jewel, another jewel on the clasp of his cloak, and a ring or two on his long sinewy fingers. He would take care too that the horse on which he went hawking and hunting should be as trim and

brilliant as himself; that the bells of his birds were polished and their leashes of good red leather. Men would turn round in the London streets smiling with pleasure to see this gallant boy a head taller than themselves on the ground, ride by over the country by Westminster or over the wooden bridge to the Southwark meadows where the wild duck lived. And God too, we know, looked on him with pleasure; for this boy in the midst of a roistering, careless society lived a life as pure as on the day he was born. It was true that he loved the lovely things that God had made, that he delighted to feel the wind in his face and his horse between his knees, and to watch the long swoop of the towering bird, and to hear the *mort* of the stag blown on the hunting-horn —this was natural enough; but for Thomas a life of clean pleasure was the life to which God called him; there was no need to defile these things with sin.

Yet, so far, this was all. There were no further signs yet that those old dreams of his mother twenty-five years before were more than any other dreams. Once, it is

true, when he was yet a boy at Merton Abbey, his father, as if under the sudden spell of prophecy, had saluted him as one would salute a saint, telling the horrified Prior that "this boy will be great before the Lord"; yet no more had happened than that; and Thomas did his accounts in Osbern's office, and rode abroad, laughing, in scarlet and blue, without one thought, so far as is known, that God had any plan for him other than that which was the life of the rest who rode and laughed with him.

II

At the end of his three years, wishing to devote himself more to the cause of the Church, Thomas (or his father for him) applied for and obtained a post in the Court of Archbishop Theobald; and he found the life there at first a little difficult. It was not only that he was compelled day after day to sit through long ecclesiastical causes—of that kind of life he had had three years—but he found now that his education had been not of the best, and that his new companions despised him for his burgher birth

and were jealous of his powers. They gave him nicknames, they plotted against him; twice even they succeeded in getting him dismissed; and especially active among these enemies of his was a clerk named Roger of whom we shall hear again. But Thomas persevered; he set himself to learn his work, to be patient and painstaking, and in a short while the Archbishop began to notice him.

For eleven years this life went on. There are not enough records of his life, nor, even if there were, have we time to follow him closely in every detail. This at least is known, that although the Archbishop's Court held the most brilliant men in England, yet Thomas' name stood high among them, and that every year saw the increase of his importance. We know well enough the kind of life that he would have lived. He would have counted as an ecclesiastic, though it was not for many years that he actually received the greater orders. To a large extent he would have passed his days in court, reporting, examining and interviewing those who came for justice; he

would have drawn up deeds, consulted precedents, pleaded the cause of this man or that; but besides this, part of his duties would have lain in accompanying the Archbishop now and then in the journeys that were necessary, staying here and there in Kent at the palaces of his patron, talking with him, riding by his side, and even hunting with him. The life would be a strange one to our ideas, yet full of opportunities for intimacy between master and servant. Each great official of State from the King downwards possessed half-a-dozen houses or more—great fortified draughty buildings—scattered over the country; and to these in turn the household would go, clerks, servants, ecclesiastics, men at arms, with their luggage, furniture, provisions, and stuffs borne on beasts' backs; and there, in each house by turn, the company would encamp as best they could; and the master would do his work in each centre, try causes if he were possessed of judicial powers, grant interviews, pay and return visits from other great houses round about, and finally, after a week or more, move on again with all his

train to his next house, leaving indescribable litter behind him.

So it was, we know, with the Archbishop. Kent is still sprinkled between London and Canterbury, with the crumbling walls of these old palaces where Theobald and Thomas lived and talked together. Little by little the Archbishop began to understand what kind of man he was; he saw that this tall young man, who loved fine dress and outdoor sports, who had such a quick temper, who rode so well, with the eye of a hawk and the ear of a stag—he saw that these things were only part of his powers; and that beneath them there lay an astonishing discretion, shrewdness and capability. He began to trust him more and more, to talk to him more openly, to ask his opinion and to confide to him secrets that he kept from others. Finally he began to employ him in more serious business than ever.

For example, the Archbishop had taken Thomas in his train to Rome almost immediately after his entrance into his service; and five years later he took him with him again to Rheims. This was a very serious

matter. Stephen, King of England, had forbidden his Archbishop to go; but Theobald, choosing to obey God rather than man, had escaped the watch set upon him, and presented himself to the Holy Father as he had been ordered. Here was a lesson for Thomas; he saw plainly enough that there were certain cases when a man's duty to his King must take second place.

A little later Thomas was sent on his own account to the Pope on a matter of the royal succession itself. Stephen, in defiance of a previous agreement, had attempted to cause his son to be crowned during his own lifetime, to prevent the succession of Henry Plantagenet; and it was through Thomas' skill and courage that the Pope was persuaded to enforce the old arrangement. We do not know the whole history of how Thomas succeeded; but at least it is certain that he came back to England with his reputation for discretion and strength higher than ever.

And now honours began to rain upon him.

It was the custom in those days—not altogether a good custom, though it had its

advantages—to confer a number of ecclesiastical offices upon one man. It was of course impossible for one man to discharge the affairs of them all; but it would be his duty to appoint suitable men to each place, and himself to pay them out of the stipends and supervise their work. It is true that Thomas was not a priest, he was not even yet actually a deacon, though he became one almost immediately; so it was in any case impossible for him to do the work of a parish-priest; but at least he knew the inner affairs of Church and State, and it was not altogether unfortunate that such a man as he should have control of a large number of important positions. For example, he held two churches, one in Kent and one in London—Otford and St. Mary-le-Strand—and two Cathedral stalls, one in St. Paul's and one in Lincoln. The custom has to some extent lasted on even into our own times, though it is thought better on the whole that one man should not hold more than one office; but at least there is nothing whatever actually wrong in the system, so long as the work is done. It speaks well for

Thomas' zeal that about this time he obtained leave from the Archbishop to go for one year to Bologna in order to study under the best authorities the science of Canon Law—the law, that is, by which the affairs of the Church are administered. Then once more he returned to England.

Now the Archbishop's Court, as has been said, held the most brilliant men in England. It was difficult enough to obtain a position there at all, it was still more difficult to rise when it had been obtained. It was from those who succeeded in this that men were selected to fill great positions. In this way Roger, Thomas' great enemy, called Pont l'Evêque, had been appointed Archdeacon of Canterbury in 1147, and in 1154 he rose yet higher and became Archbishop of York. This left the Archdeaconry vacant, and Theobald's choice fell upon Thomas to fill it, as well as to become Provost of Beverley. Thomas, then, now stood in the most important place next to the bishops and abbots. He had the great diocese of Canterbury under his charge, under the Archbishop himself; there were numerous appointments at his disposal;

he had become practically the chief adviser of the first subject of the realm.

It is wonderful to see how this young man had risen under God's Providence. He was still in the prime of life; he had had no special advantages that others had not, yet in less than twenty years he had become, from being an unknown student in Paris, a man on whom the eyes of all were fixed—one to whom great affairs had been entrusted, and who had discharged them well. Yet this position was only the first stage of greatness. For two years he administered the Archdeaconry. In 1154 Henry II was crowned King; and in 1155, at the age of thirty-eight, Thomas was appointed Lord Chancellor of England.

II

CHANCELLOR AND ARCHBISHOP

BEFORE going further, that we may understand Thomas in all through which he is to go, it is necessary to say a few words about what seems to have been, on the natural side, the key to his character, to the extraordinary speed with which he rose to power, and to the effectiveness with which he used it. We shall have to speak of events that took place long after this point in his story, but it will be far easier to understand those events and why they have remained so prominent in English history, if we try to understand first this central actor in them.

The key of his character seems to have been this, that he possessed what is known as a "magnetic personality."

It is an undefinable thing, and yet unmistakeable: it is sometimes pleasant and

sometimes unpleasant, but it is always there in souls which make strong friends and strong enemies. Such souls as these go through life like a flame, they kindle or consume. They kindle those with whom they have sympathy, they set on fire with hatred those with whom they have not. Now it is remarkable to notice how true this is of Thomas, and how curiously it shows itself. At first, as we shall see, he attracted the friendship of men of violent passions, such as was Henry II; later, as Thomas' own soul grew in grace, that friendship turned to fury. There were times when all the world seemed against him—that world was never indifferent to him—and yet all the while those who are God's friends were his: the poor and the simple loved him to passion; men-at-arms and barons—brutal, worldly, ambitious—these loved him when he led them to battle, and turned against him in the bitterest anger and contempt when he stood out for God and the Church. There were times when his personal friends were reduced to half-a-dozen, while the rest stormed against him; and these friends were of the most strange

varieties—one a man of astonishing external arrogance, another a wit, another a scholar, another a passionate enthusiast, and others, apparently, simple-minded monks. It is generally so with "strong" or "magnetic" personalities; they simultaneously attract some and repel others, and both these are often of surprising varieties. In many other ways Thomas' character shows itself to be of this nature: his very face and figure illustrated it, his long sensitive hands, his wide eyes, his prominent nose and thin lips. His actions illustrated it: his complete indifference to popularity, his sternness even with those who reverenced him, his emphatic living up to his position whatever it might be, his fierce austerities, his severity in judging himself, his unruffled and persevering courtesy, his "strong crying" and tears.

Now these things are not necessarily the marks of a saint. There have been saints who have been otherwise, tender, tactful, almost soft souls of exquisite delicacy, whose strength lay rather in a hidden kind of self-control; and there have been eminent sin-

ners, soldiers, rulers, adventurers who have been strong after Thomas' way, unsupernatural men who neither feared nor loved God nor man. But when these powers are, as in Thomas, united with sanctity they are appallingly effective, and are almost bound to lead to some kind of martyrdom. If ever a man was raised up by God in a difficult age to do a particular kind of work it was Thomas. It was an age when only the strong could accomplish anything; and we see this by the astonishing collapse of nearly all the English prelates under the fierce self-assertion of Henry. But Thomas' ultimate strength lay not in his use of these natural gifts, but in his complete readiness to die for God's cause, instead of living for it, when the time came. So long as it was of any use he opposed strength to strength, he snarled back at Northampton like a lion among dogs, he looked straight into the passionate hawk's eyes of Henry, and gave him challenge for challenge. But when at last the hour struck when neither persuasion nor righteous wrath nor patience was of any avail, he marched, as we shall see, straight

to death, knowing that, like his Lord Himself, the time was gone by for using a scourge in the Temple, and rebukes and challenges—he must now submit himself to the scourge instead, and, laying aside all natural weapons in God's battle, he must take up the last and supreme supernatural weapon which never fails, the very Cross of Calvary on which he is to die.

Next we must consider shortly the other great actor in all these events.

Henry II, Thomas' new master, the first Plantagenet king, was the son of Geoffrey of Anjou and Matilda. At this time he was twenty-one years old—of middle height, keen-eyed, high-browed, broad-chested, strong and sinewy, eyed like a bird of prey. He was, moreover, endowed with an extraordinarily passionate temper; and would sit, at times, in a silent fury, clawing at the cushion of his chair, chewing the straw that he tore out of it, or rocking on his bed muttering and cursing. But he had, too, the extreme affectionateness that goes with strong feelings; and in a very short while Henry and Thomas were the best friends in the world.

Indeed Henry seems to have been a very charming companion, friendly, humorous, and devoted to a kind of rollicking mirth that showed itself in a hundred ways. For example, he would ride, all unannounced, into his Chancellor's hall, delighted at the consternation that his royalty produced; he would dismount at the dais, vault across the table, and sit himself down beside his friend to drink a cup of wine. There is a pleasant story of his solemnly questioning his Chancellor one day, as the two, riding together through the streets, saw a beggar make ready to ask an alms.

"My lord," he said, "would it not be a meritorious act to relieve this poor man?"

"No doubt, Sir," said Thomas.

"Then you shall have the merit of doing it," said the King; and seized his friend's scarlet furred cloak to throw it to the beggar. Thomas resisted; and the citizens of London had the privilege of seeing their King and the Chancellor wrestling on horseback over the question as to which should avoid doing an act of charity.

But Henry was a serious ruler as well.

His possessions were enormous. Not only was England his, but large parts of France —Normandy, Anjou, Touraine, and Maine; and these dominions were in a condition difficult to realize in our days of fatted peace and county councils. Wales, for instance, and parts of England as well, to go no further afield, were in a perpetual state of semi-war. The nobles in Stephen's reign had lived very much like petty kings, building themselves vast fortified castles, ruling their lands with almost unlimited powers, and continually ready to make an amateur kind of war upon their sovereign. All this Henry had to deal with—and since Henry, therefore Thomas. Thomas' business, therefore, became of a very secular nature. It would be he who had to do with the granting of charters to rising towns—a method of giving self-respect and loyal seriousness to those who might otherwise be content with lawlessness. But besides the ordinary work of the Chancellor, which was enormous, since he was practically the first officer of the realm, Thomas had also peculiar difficulties to contend with. It was only

The King, the Chancellor, and the Beggar. [p. 31

natural that men should be violently jealous of this young man who had risen so swiftly to such enormous power, and that they should do all that was possible to obstruct him and undermine his influence in every conceivable way. And again the nobles, whose power Thomas had to repress, were not likely to love him for it; and, yet again, while Thomas' sympathies and conscience were on the side of the Church, his position made him the servant of the State, and he had to do his best to reconcile these occasionally conflicting interests.

In foreign matters, too, his task was not easy, and especially in France, where the question of frontiers between French and English dominions was perpetually causing friction. It is obvious that the fact of an English king possessing huge districts over the sea would not be likely to promote peace.

But Thomas was wonderfully successful. Not only was he a brilliant diplomatist, utterly conscientious, courteous, pleasant, and strong, but he had still that love of splendour and generosity that always calls

out admiration. For example, the description of a visit which he paid to the King of France is worth giving almost in full, since it offers a picture not only of life as it then was, but of the gorgeous tastes of Thomas himself, and of the way in which he was capable of rising to a great occasion.

He was sent in 1158 to confer with Louis on this question of frontier fortresses; and he realized that in order to succeed he must make a deep impression of splendour upon all who saw him. He crossed in six ships, taking with him a retinue of two hundred men, knights, clerks, and noble boys. He had eight cars, each drawn by five horses, and guarded by a huge mastiff, with a groom in new livery at the head of each horse. These cars were laden; first, with what was called his "chapel," that is, a complete set of altar furniture, vestments, lamps, bells; the next carried his "wardrobe," endless piles of stuffs and jewels in great caskets; the next his "private chamber," and two more his "kitchen," with great ironbound barrels of English ale. There followed twelve sumpter-horses, laden

with more stuffs; a groom led each, and a monkey sat on its neck. There followed strings of other beasts, carrying coffers, plate, money, jewels, utensils, led by one horse carrying the sacred vessels of the altar. In the very front of the whole vast procession came company after company of soldiers as an advance-guard, singing as they went. Behind came the knights with their esquires and the clerks; and last of all the great, keen-faced Chancellor himself, surrounded by friends, towering a foot above his fellows on his huge horse, with its silver bit and chains, ablaze with colour and jewels.

The Frenchmen had never seen anything like it, except when royalty rode abroad. Men ran out of their houses to see the jingling, glittering pomp go by; they cried out that if the English Chancellor went with such glory, what must be the glory of the English King!

Then, too, his gifts on this journey were as magnificent as himself. Those great chests rocking in the carts and on the backs of horses were not so much for his own use as to give pleasure to those who entertained

him; and out of them came furs, jewels, and splendid stuffs. The very beasts that bore them were given away.

These years then, that went by, added, every one of them, to Thomas' reputation. At times he went with his King through the French dominions; at times he sat at home and administered English affairs. War broke out between Louis and Henry in 1159; and Thomas, at the head of seven hundred knights, rode with Henry and Malcolm of Scotland to meet the French. He fought, too, with the rest, though he was a clerk of Christ's Church, for it was not then thought impossible that a minister of peace should be also a man of war. At another time it was twelve hundred knights and four thousand men-at-arms that he maintained and led to battle. Yet he did not forget the higher duty which was his; he spoke plainly to Henry more than once when Church and State seemed in conflict, and twice upheld, though without success, the laws of marriage when the King wished to set them aside.

In domestic affairs he was more prosper-

ous. It is astonishing what peace he brought to England by his advice to Henry; the old days of slaughter and plunder seemed about to vanish away. Waste lands were brought under cultivation; the ruined villages began once more to take heart; the brutal castles were swept aside; the great positions in Church and State were no longer bought and sold by men whose only qualification was that of riches; old abuses of justice were done away; and by a reform of the system of taxation wealth was once more made accessible for purposes of State.

With regard to Thomas' dealings with the Church, if one thing is clear, it is this—that he was not in the least a man who pushed his Order at the expense of his loyalty. More than once he refused to listen to an ecclesiastical claim against the King, even when his old friend Theobald was behind it: he was perfectly impartial; he taxed Churchmen as he taxed laymen, and, in fact, so loyal and reasonable was he, that Henry, when he made him Archbishop, seems to have thought that he was wholly on his side. There were innumerable questions to

be decided between Church and State; again and again small points came up as to the appointment of this man or the other, as to the infliction or the remission of a fine, as to the punishment or acquittal of an ecclesiastic; and again and again Thomas decided the cause and advised the King, on the merits of the case, and not according to his own tastes. He yielded even to what was known as "scutage," an undoubtedly unjust form of taxation of ecclesiastics, since it was levied in place of military service, to which ecclesiastics were in no way subject. It was certainly a mistake for Thomas to yield to this, but it shows clearly enough that he was as zealous for the State now as he was for the Church afterwards. There he stood, Chancellor of England; his business was to administer the laws, and he knew and did his business. It is extremely important to remember this, in view of what happened a few years later. He was not in the least, as some have tried to pretend, a narrow-minded, selfish, obstinate ecclesiastic, determined to bow the King to his will.

So then time went on, and his honours

fell thicker upon him every year, and his applause was in all men's mouths. He still held the great positions that Theobald had given him, his Archdeaconry of Canterbury, his churches, and his cathedral stalls; and now he was Dean of Hastings, the keeper of the Tower of London, the guardian of Berkhamstead Castle, and the Castle of Eye, with its one hundred and forty knights. There was no end to his activities; he took his duties seriously; he spent great sums upon the Tower; he was careful that his representatives should be as worthy as himself.

Yet who would have thought what God had in store for him?

It is true that his pure life still continued; that he did his duty to God as fervently as his duty to his King; it was through his advice, remembering, no doubt, his old school days, that the King endowed and finished the abbey church of Merton; but the splendour in which he lived gave no hint of another kind of splendour to which God would call him. We can see him, looking back over eight hundred years, sitting

in his great hall that was fully as gorgeous as the King's. Great tables run the length of it, crowded with knights and clerks; at one table sit the noble boys of his household, sent to him by their fathers to learn how gentlemen should live and act. In the middle, in a space cleared among the fresh leaves and twigs with which the floor is strewn every day, burns a huge fire, of which the smoke coils up into the dim gilded roof overhead. Servants move to and fro with the clash of dishes, bearing silver and golden plate in endless profusion. Huge heaps of food are brought smoking from the kitchen —lampreys, pikes, eels; mutton, beef, game of all kinds, wild-fowl, haunches of venison; quinces, fruits, and custards. The silver cups go round, and music, wild and braying in our ears, crashes from the gallery overhead. The tables are crowded; knights and esquires have to wait their turn; a surging company of beggars waits in the court to receive the broken food when dinner is done; and there, on the dais, beneath the grim tapestries, sits the master of all in his tall chair. There are other great figures there,

ecclesiastics, officers of State, Frenchmen, Italians, Norwegians, each great in his own country; but he who sits there in the midst, with his wide piercing eyes, and his thin curved nose, and his smiling tight lips, in his scarlet and jewels and furs, is the greatest of them all. He is a deacon of the Catholic Church, though you would not know it; and it seems as if he had almost forgotten it himself in his more splendid honours. Those long, beautiful hands have held a sword more often than the sacred vessels of the altar; and that strong mouth, stammering ever so slightly now and again, has talked more of the affairs of this world than of the next. He will go out presently, and all will stand as he passes out; and the great men will follow him into a parlour for the "banquet" of nuts and fruit; and the beggars will throw up their caps and shout; and this afternoon, perhaps, the King will take his arm and laugh with him.

And yet God's pleasure is still with him; and God's voice will call him to honours greater even than these or than all that the world can give; for beneath all this splendour

burns the heart of a saint. There is no man that loves our Lady more in all London—he has already written a noble hymn in her honour—and those shoulders, so broad under the scarlet and gold, are marked with the lash of the discipline.

In 1159 died Hadrian IV, the English Pope, once Nicholas Breakspear, and Alexander III reigned in his stead. It was this Pontiff that ruled Christendom for the rest of Thomas' life, and who conferred upon him, after his death, the greatest honour that any can receive. In the spring of 1161 died Theobald, and the See of Canterbury and Primacy of all England was vacant.

But at this time both the King and Thomas were in France, and, owing to the difficulty of travel, as well as to his own urgent affairs, the Chancellor was unable to go back to see his old friend. He received, however, one or two affectionate and pathetic letters from the Archbishop, telling him that all the world knew that King and Chancellor "had but one heart and soul" between them, and entreating him to do all in his power to help the Church in England in her difficulties.

These difficulties were of all kinds, but the greatest of all consisted in the bad old custom of allowing bishoprics to remain vacant for many months, and even years, at a time. (Another was that of a particular form of taxation called "second aids," levied by the Archdeacon of Canterbury, against which Theobald now protested.) But a year passed away after Theobald's death, and even Canterbury itself had no ruler.

In the spring of 1162 revolts broke out in Wales, and Thomas was sent across to deal with them. He went to Falaise Castle, in Normandy, to take his leave of the King; and there, in a private room, with only a few persons present, Henry told him that it was his will to make him Archbishop.

Thomas laughed.

"Why, look at my dress!" he said. "Is this the kind of man, Sir, you would set over monks and Churchmen?"

Henry persisted.

"I tell you, Sir," said Thomas frankly, "that if you do this thing you will bitterly regret it. You say you love me now. Well, that love will turn to hatred."

The King shook his head, and turned to one of his nobles.

"Richard," he said, "if I lay dead, would you not do your utmost to set my son on my throne?"

"I would, Sir," said De Luci.

"Well, then, do that same utmost to set Thomas here upon the throne of Canterbury. Go with my lord, and tell the monks and the churchmen what is my will."

In May the election was held, and Thomas, persuaded at last by Cardinal Henry of Pisa to accept office, was Archbishop.

Now if ever any man had an opportunity to indulge his ambition it was Thomas.

A chronicler so describes his condition at this time:

"Most mighty in England, Archdeacon and King's Chancellor, glorious in the eyes of all, renowned for wisdom, admirable to all for nobility of heart, terrible to his enemies and rivals, friend of the King and second in the kingdom, indeed ruler of the King and all but his master."

There was another Thomas, whose surname was Cranmer, four hundred years

later, who had the same opportunity and who took it to the full. But this one did not. If he had so chosen he could without doubt have made himself tyrant, not only of the State, but of Church as well; he could have placed in his King's hands an almost unbounded opportunity of drawing the revenues and compelling the utter obedience of those who held those revenues and that obedience for God; and he himself could have shared, almost without reproach, in that tremendous power. But, as he had half prophesied to the King, that was not to be his object. He had learnt well enough how to serve Caesar; now he was to serve God. He knew well enough that to rule the Church of God, he must be a servant of the servants of God. He knew too of what spirit his master was, and of what spirit the men who were about him; he knew that no pains would be spared to make mischief, to represent him as a proud priest, to estrange him from his old friend. Henry was a true Norman. There was not that loyal co-operation with the Church of God that had accomplished so much in Saxon days. Jealousy

and ambition against Christ's Kingdom were among the marks of the Norman dynasty. Yet Thomas did not flinch. There were abominable injustices lying upon the Church in England, and with these injustices he could now deal for the first time unhindered.

He first began to secure himself against attack, so far as was possible, and with this object asked for and obtained a complete release of all old money obligations which he had incurred as Chancellor, and which might possibly be brought against him afterwards. This was granted, in the name of the King, by the little Prince Henry who solemnly nodded and assented in the presence of the English Court; and the King himself, as we know from his letter to the Pope asking for the Pallium, consented to the remission. Then, as soon as the formalities were over, Thomas set out, with a huge train, to Canterbury.

It was a strange journey, but nothing was so strange as a little conversation that took place on the way. The great Chancellor, Archbishop-Elect, as he rode down through

Kent, stared upon by all in his splendour, called up to his side a certain young man named Herbert of Bosham—a swaggerer by all accounts, but extremely shrewd and extremely fond of the sound of his own voice.

"I had a dream last night," whispered the Archbishop-Elect. Then he told it him. He had dreamed that a venerable old man had come to him and given him ten talents. Herbert was silent. Presently the great man went on.

"Tell me, Herbert," he said, "if ever you see anything wrong in my conduct or words. Four eyes are better than two."

On the Saturday in Whitsun week he was made priest; and on the following morning he was consecrated and enthroned.

Early in the morning the great Cathedral was full from end to end, of knights, esquires, clerks, nobles and the common people. Fourteen bishops were there, and supreme among them, Henry of Winchester, who was to consecrate his new master. The lights burned on the high altar, in hanging silver basins before it, and before the images of the saints.

The monks were in their stalls, and the sacristans went to and fro about their business.

Then, quite alone, down from the chapel of St. Andrew on the north east came a single tall figure walking alone, dressed in black cloak and surplice, with the frock of a monk shewing beneath, and beneath that another vestment seen of none but God, and more honourable than them all, since it was the sign of a penitent, and tore his flesh at each movement. The figure came on, turned to the left and prostrated itself before the glittering altar, behind which, set about with seven columns, stood the white chair of Augustine; and above which, raised on a high beam, sat an image of our Lord in majesty, a gilt and crystal cross beneath, with seven shrines of relics; and on either side the splendid altars and shrines of St. Dunstan and St. Elphege. Then after a long pause, the figure rose again, passed down the choir and stood waiting. . . .

When all was done, once more that figure, now in splendid vestments, disappeared with its attendants behind the high altar; and

passing by the tombs where lay the bodies of saints who had once occupied that white stone chair—St. Odo and St. Wilfrid, Lanfranc, and Theobald lately dead—the little procession came to the small square chapel at the extreme east end of the church, dedicated to the Most Holy and Blessed Trinity; and there, above the very spot where nine years later his own scarred body was to lie, for the first time in his life Thomas, so long a deacon, now at last priest and bishop, made the Body of his Lord.

III

TROUBLES IN ENGLAND

I

IN August of the same year, upon St. Laurence's day, Thomas, barefoot before the high altar of his Cathedral, received the Pall—the little Y-shaped vestment that is the symbol and conveyer of jurisdiction from the Vicar of Christ—and set himself down to his new work.

Never was there so great a change in the life of any man, as this which befell Thomas. Yet it was not that his heart and intention were changed: there was no need for that. Before his consecration he was Chancellor; it was part of his position to spend royally, to dress magnificently, to represent his king worthily; and this he had done. Now he was a representative of the King of the kings whose glory lies in discipline and humility. As he passed out of his hall on the day of his consecration the jesters clamoured

round him for largesse. He shook his head, smiling.

"I am not he who was Chancellor," he said.

For a time he still dressed with his old splendour, in furs and rich stuffs, unwilling probably to advertise to the world his altered intentions. Then quietly he laid them aside; and put on him instead the frock of a monk, a surplice of fine linen, and, in memory of his old school, the great black cloak of the Augustinians, trimmed, however, with cheap lambswool in the place of expensive fur. He wore also his stole at all times, even when he slept, and, later, he received and wore the Cistercian cowl.

His life, too, was astonishingly changed. As Chancellor he had done his austerities in private—his long prayers, even at the doors of churches after dark, his sleeping upon the floor beside his rich bed, his disciplines received at the hands of priests. Now he was the superior of monks and must set an open example.

His palace at Canterbury stood at the north-west of the Cathedral, in its own

orchard and garden: a covered passage, seldom used, led from it to the south end of the great cloister, and another door at the north-west end also gave entrance to the cloister. On the north of this cloister stood the refectory and buttery; on the south-east side the chapter-house, beside which a door opened into the Cathedral itself. The other great buildings of Christchurch monastery were to the eastwards again and were reached by covered passages beneath the monk's dormitory—the cloister, hall and chapel of the infirmary, the Prior's lodging, and, against the Cathedral itself the strong vestries where the treasures were kept—altar vessels, vestments, images of precious metal, ancient service-books, the gifts of old kings, bound in gold and jewels. In every court ran pipes of water, recently laid down, to form washing-places and drinking fountains, from the spring on the south of the church.

But the Cathedral itself was the glory of all; and into this, standing amongst its cemeteries and trees, Thomas would pass day by day through the cloister, going by the great cupboards where Lanfranc's books

were stored, and the wooden studies stood, with his cross before him and his chaplains coming behind. There he would find himself in the vast church, with its rows of round columns, its flights of steps, its twenty-six altars, its priceless relics, its towering rood beneath the central lantern, its countless images, its starry roof, and its great chair dominating all, where he sat. There he would sit, we know, as the Holy Father sits to-day, while parts of the Mass were sung, in a chasuble hung with bells like Aaron's, descending for the consecration with his Welsh crossbearer going before him. There from the high altar, mitred and coped, he would give the blessing of a saint, and there again, from the pulpit beneath, he would preach his fiery sermons, and publish the censures and remissions which he alone had a right to give.

But it was not all a life of glory. Each night, after a few hours' sleep, he would go to the night office, with lanterns, through the cloister, and sing God's praises there with the rest in the echoing Cathedral while the world slept. Next, after returning, in a

small private room, as an act of humility, he washed and kissed the feet of thirteen poor men from the city, and then waited on them while they breakfasted. Then again, after a little sleep, he gave himself up to study of the Scriptures with one or two intimate friends, Herbert of Bosham or some priest. At nine o'clock he either said or heard Mass, depriving himself, as we know, sometimes, of standing at the altar out of a spirit of penitence. To see him say Mass was a wonderful sight; the tears would run down his cheeks as he handled the Body of our Lord. . . .

A little before midday he dined, entertaining, as his custom had always been, those who came to him, waited upon by boys of noble family. There was no music played as in the old days; instead the Scriptures were read aloud. Occasionally his food would be delicate, as he suffered a little from illness. To an insolent guest one day who commented on this, he said smiling:

"I think, my dear brother, you are more eager over your beans than I over my pheasant."

After dinner, if necessary, he would make up for his short sleep the night before; and then, after conversation, either ride out with his friends or more often go over to the cloister, where the monks studied and walked; sometimes he would pass on to the infirmary and occupy himself in waiting upon any sick that were there. Later again, after supper and prayers and receiving the discipline (tearing himself with his nails, we are told, and crying "Miserrimus"), he would go to bed, or, fully as often, lie down and sleep beside his bed on the stone floor. It was an age of strong passions, and men used strong measures. (And this was the man, this careful shepherd of his sheep, to whom Gilbert, his envious rival, dared to write, "You entered into your sheepfold not by the door, but climbing up some other way.")

The rumours of all this distressed the King. It seemed as if, after all, Thomas was not so entirely a man of the world as he had hoped; and he became still more uneasy when a letter reached him from the Archbishop resigning the Great Seal. He answered with some sharpness, telling him

he should resign the archdeaconry too. Thomas hesitated a little, and then obeyed.

A little before Christmas Henry came back to England. The Archbishop met him with the old affection, rode with him to London, and sang Mass in his presence in St. Paul's Cathedral on Christmas Day. There had been already a slight attempt on the part of some of the nobles to complain of Thomas' recovery of some alienated church lands, but it came to nothing. The bishopric of London was soon filled by the appointment of Gilbert Foliot, late of Hereford; and he with his Metropolitan soon after Easter set out immediately for the Council of Tours, called by the Pope. At present there was nothing against Gilbert; he seemed as devoted to Thomas as to Henry, and was full of zeal towards the Apostolic See. Thomas' visit to Tours was marked by extraordinary enthusiasm; he was received first by an enormous crowd, including several cardinals, and then by Alexander himself with particular attention. When the Council was over the English bishops and archbishops returned home again.

So time went on, quietly enough for the present until nearly the end of the year. The Archbishop took part in several great ceremonies, such as the consecration of Reading Abbey Church and the translation of the relics of St. Edward the Confessor, lately canonized. Henry was present at this last ceremony, showing great devotion to the dead and great affection to the living saints. And then at last the inevitable storm began to brew, as Thomas had pre dicted.

It began with a number of small things, like heavy rain-drops from a thunder cloud, connected with the difficult relations of Church and State. For example, two or three of them concerned the trial and punishment of ecclesiastics. Henry claimed that these should be tried and punished twice, first by the Church Courts and then by his own. Thomas flatly refused. Another case concerned the excommunication of a man who had wrongfully driven out from his church one of the priests of the Archbishop. Henry demanded that he should be absolved, and Thomas in this case yielded for the sake of

peace. These do not seem important matters for two old friends to quarrel about; but it must be remembered that Henry was terribly afraid of losing his dignity in the eyes of his people if he were worsted, that he was disappointed to find that his ex-chancellor could not be turned about in the direction he wished, and, finally, there were plenty of nobles about the King who, out of jealousy, spared no pains to make mischief, as well as plenty of ecclesiastics who envied Thomas his position. The story of these churchmen is a piteous one. Such men as Gilbert Foliot, Roger of York, and others, might have handed their names down to posterity as friends and supporters of a saint: they had an immense opportunity of shewing courage and loyalty; and instead of all this we know them only now as weak or timid or ambitious prelates, who preferred their own advancement and the King's friendship, to the friendship of God and His saints. This then was the situation; trouble began to brew, and finally, the first real peal of thunder broke in a council at Westminster, at which the King, losing control of himself, demanded that

Thomas and the bishops should take an oath to "observe the royal customs."

Now this was a clever way of putting it. If the bishops refused they would seem disloyal; if they accepted it would mean that they gave up all the rights of the Church to the King. Their answer was the one alone possible for them to make—that they would observe these customs "saving their order." Henry was furious. The council sat till late disputing. One bishop half yielded; but Thomas held the rest firm, and finally, in dead silence, white with anger, Henry rose and left the hall.

Then the storm was up. The next morning the King sent to demand that Thomas should resign all the castles he had received during his chancellorship. Thomas did so at once, for this did not touch God's honour, but his own dignity only. The bishops were thoroughly frightened; and presently not only did Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, who had half yielded in the council, go after the King to make peace, but even Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London, Thomas' old friend, deserted him for Henry. Finally, the King

demanded that Thomas should meet him near Northampton and give an explanation.

It must have been a moving scene—the two cavalcades, one of courtiers the other of ecclesiastics, filing through into a field by the roadside where the meeting was held, and drawing apart into two camps while the leaders, the King in his riding dress and the Archbishop in his cloak and stole, met like champions in the middle.

"You are my man," cried the King, "I raised you from nothing, and you defy me."

"Peter too was raised from nothing, Sir," answered the Archbishop, "yet he ruled the Church."

"Yes, but Peter died for his Lord."

"And I, too, will die for Him when the time comes."

"And you will not yield to me, then?" cried the King.

"I will not, Sir," said the Archbishop.

The King turned his horse and rode out of the field.

Time went on, and the year 1163 was drawing at last to its close. On all sides, from ecclesiastics as well as from nobles,

arguments poured in upon the Archbishop; finally an abbot came from the Pope urging Thomas to make peace. Either Alexander did not send the message, or else he did not understand the situation; but it was enough for Thomas, and, riding to Woodstock, he yielded, withdrawing the phrase, "saving his order," about which the dispute had raged.

But still he was not at peace. His old enemy, Roger Pont l'Evêque, who had been with him in Theobald's Court and was now Archbishop of York, made new trouble by demanding the right to have his Archiepiscopal Cross carried before him in the province of Canterbury. This was an old dispute, and was more serious than it seems, since it touched the question as to how far Canterbury was supreme over the Church in England.

Finally, Thomas wrote to the Pope in despair, saying that wave after wave of trouble was breaking over the Church, explaining all the disputes, and entreating for guidance. The Pope answered by a letter full of praise and encouragement, telling

him he must suffer cheerfully for Christ's sake, and urging him, whatever else he did, to aim at peace in all things, and not to dream for an instant of resigning his position. If Thomas could not save the situation no other man in England could do so. And so the year ended, and the new year began.

II

The new year began in gloom, for a council assembled at Clarendon, called by the King to drive his demands home, and to this council Thomas went with a heavy heart. Presently once more the demands were made that the "royal customs" should be observed; and there followed a scene.

In one room the ecclesiastics sat apart deliberating; but the King, hearing that Thomas once more was doubtful as to whether he should consent or not, used every means to terrify him. Into the very hall itself where the clergy sat came armed men, wearing the King's colours. We can imagine the picture—the upper end of the high room crowded with prelates, white-faced and nervous, with Thomas in his great

chair in the centre, heavy and silent; and, at the lower end, the whispering, clanking figures eyeing him and his fellows. But the armed men were not the difficulty; Thomas was ready to die, but he was not so ready to ruin those who trusted and looked to him. One by one they came up and leaned by him, talking fiercely and pathetically; Jocelin, Bishop of Salisbury, and Roger of Worcester, were two of them, entreating him for the love of God to yield and be reasonable. Nobles came in from the court outside, telling him the King was determined; finally two Templars came to assure him that the King meant no harm, but only to preserve his dignity in the eyes of the world. And at last Thomas yielded.

"My lord," he said, standing before Henry a few minutes later, "Your Excellency must remember that I have not been fighting for my own rights, but for those of God. But, believing in your moderation, I will assent to what you ask; and, in good faith, I promise to observe the customs in the word of truth."

It was done, and Henry leapt to his feet,

calling all to witness what had been said, demanding that the rest of the bishops should make the same promise. One by one they did so. Then the King, following up his advantage, demanded that the "royal customs" should now be written down in full, that all might know plainly what was claimed. Thomas assented and the council adjourned.

All that evening the scribes were at work, and upon the next morning the papers were ready. It would take too much space to describe all that was claimed, but, in a word, it may be said that, when written out at length, the demands made were such as no Churchman could for an instant admit. For example, all ecclesiastics were to be judged by the King; no person, ecclesiastic or not, was to leave the kingdom, even when summoned by the Pope, without the King's leave; no member of the royal household could be excommunicated without the same leave; the Pope was practically shelved as a Court of Appeal from the Archbishop, the King having the right of veto over such appeals; all vacant bishoprics and abbacies

were to lie in the King's hands. To each, as it came up, Thomas, dismayed and discouraged, made his answer, showing how, although some of these were truly old customs, practised from time to time, yet they had never been laws in the proper sense of the term, and that he for one would never consent to admit them, now he understood what the King had meant. Finally, in a burst of indignation, he cried aloud:

"By the Lord Almighty, my seal shall never touch these papers."

But he had promised! The officials were silent. Presently, without further comment, they handed to him a copy of the "customs," and another to Roger of York. The third they kept for the King. And so the council ended; and Thomas, mounting his horse, rode away.

Now one of the Archbishop's attendants was a Welshman named Llewellyn. (We shall hear of him again and again before the end. It was he who carried the cross before his master.) As the company of ecclesiastics rode away they noticed that Thomas rode apart, his head on his breast. Little by little

they drew near him again, talking over what had been done, some doubting, some applauding. Finally, as the Archbishop still rode silently, Llewellyn cried out aloud:

"The storm has overthrown the pillars of the Church; through the shepherd's foolishness the sheep are flying before the wolf. . . . What virtue has he left who has so betrayed his conscience and good name?"

Thomas turned his heavy face.

"Of whom are you speaking, my son?"

"Of you, my lord," cried the Welshman, excitedly. "It is you who have joined yourself with the servants of Satan to cast down the liberties of Christ's Church."

There was a moment of awful silence; and then Thomas, bursting into sobs, confessed that it was true. He had betrayed the Church, he said, by his promise; he had enslaved her—he who had dared to enter her service from the court of the King; he was deserted by God, he cried; he was unfit to stand any longer at the altar; he was fit only to be dethroned and degraded.

"My lord," said Herbert of Bosham, "Our Lord is merciful to those who fall. If you

have sinned with Peter, repent also with Peter. . . . If you have been Saul, persecuting the Church, become now Paul to defend her."

And now what shall we say of Thomas ourselves? It is true that he had consented, worked upon by his terrified friends, threatened by the King, urged even, it had seemed at one time, by the Holy Father himself. But we dare not judge him as hardly as he judged himself. (For forty days he abstained from offering the Holy Sacrifice.) For at least he had refused his seal when he understood what were the actual claims made by the King. He had consented generally, believing that the King was in good faith and desired no more than to preserve his dignity; but when he had understood that the King did indeed intend to bring the Church under his own authority, then without fear he had resisted. It was a fault that he had committed in promising at all; but it was a fault of judgement, not of conscience. As an old writer says of him: "He cast over the tackling to save the ship; he became poor that we might be rich: He became a fool to make others wise."

And now the King and his friends began to push home the advantage they had gained. First the King sent his men to Canterbury to confiscate Thomas' goods; but the men, meeting Thomas' stern eyes as he came out from the Cathedral, rode away again harmlessly. Next the King and his friends tried to obtain the Pope's sanction for the "Constitutions," and, very naturally, they failed, the Pope at the same time sending a message of encouragement to Thomas and telling him to resume his ministrations at the altar. Next Henry attempted to crush Thomas still further by persuading the Pope to make Roger of York Papal legate instead of Thomas; and here, too, he failed. In every conceivable direction Henry made war upon Thomas; but there was only one point in which he at all succeeded. This was with regard to a certain Clarembald, of whom we shall hear again, a man of exceedingly wicked life, who had managed to get himself elected abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury. Clarembald, of course with Henry's support, demanded to be installed in his abbey, at the same time refusing Thomas' blessing unless

it were given in St. Augustine's, and refusing also to take any oath of obedience to the Archbishop. He succeeded in persuading the Pope to order his installation, but for all that he never received his abbatial blessing. Later on he was deprived by Alexander III, and was turned out altogether by Archbishop Richard, who succeeded St. Thomas. He was a thoroughly evil man, and, as will be seen later, actually assisted the murderers of the Saint a few years afterwards.

This then was the only point in which any success was gained by the Court party against Thomas; so Henry had to set about some other means of attacking him. Finally he refused to see Thomas at Woodstock; and then, after one interview, when all else was useless, he devised a plot for the Archbishop's final humiliation. This plot was as follows.

It will be remembered that when Thomas had become Archbishop he had asked and obtained from Prince Henry a complete release from all his secular obligations. This release had been ratified in the choir of Canterbury immediately before his consecration. It was

this release that Henry determined to repudiate. There were, as well, other absurd charges to be brought against the Archbishop—as, for example, that he was guilty of treason in not attending the King at a time when he was too ill to travel. Now if the King was able to sue Thomas for enormous payments, or to "prove" him guilty of treason, his object would be gained and the Archbishop would be powerless. In October, therefore, he summoned a council at Northampton, and sent a command to the Sheriff of Kent that the Archbishop was to appear and answer the charges against him.

Was Henry, then, simply an unprincipled bully? Probably not. He had been a good friend to Thomas a year or two before; he was capable, as will be seen, of very deep and real repentance; and a man cannot be wholly bad who is capable of friendship with a saint, and of penitence towards God. But he was a Norman. Henry was just a violent-tempered man who had determined to be master of every one in his dominions. When he was checked in this it was all the more maddening that his opponent had once

been a friend of his own—one with whom he had laughed and banqueted, whom he had raised to great dignities. Henry had thought that these things would over-ride loyalty to God: he had been friend to a saint, but he had not understood that a saint was first a friend of God.

So the writs were issued; and Northampton began to fill with troops and clerks.

III

It is not often that the champions of God and of the world stand out clear and distinct, each with his weapons, opposed one to the other in the open field. The battle-ground is more usually a confusion of figures, in which blows fall this way and that; friends are wounded as well as foes; right and might seem inextricably mingled; the battle sways now on one side, now on another, and only God Himself, who reads hearts and knows all men and things perfectly, sees how the conflict goes. When, however, the two armies draw apart, and a giant figure rides out on each side, each resolute and clear-sighted, each utterly determined to fight

with all his power, then the roar of tongues ceases, and the world stands still to stare.

It was so now in England. On one side stood Henry, representing earthly dominion, seeking, as Herod against Jesus Christ, and Nero against Peter, and the French Republic against Pius X, to bring the Kingdom of God into subjection to his own. There against him stood Thomas, loyal and obedient in all else, but utterly defiant in this, ready to die if need be, but never to yield. This is what makes the scene at Northampton one of those that history can never forget. Historians may abuse Thomas, calling him a "turbulent priest," an ambitious Churchman, a disloyal Englishman, but they cannot ignore him. It is in these moments of history that the issue stands clear, and God's purposes emerge from confusion.

It was on a Tuesday again, October 6th, 1164, that the Archbishop's train, numbering about forty men, drew near Northampton. He must surely have been very silent as he rode among his clerks, in his cloak and stole; for he knew what lay before him. At

the very gates of the city he received his first rebuff. His servants came out to tell him that his lodgings had been purposely occupied by King's men. He halted instantly, and sent a message back to the King that he would not come one step further unless his rooms were given back to him. The King yielded, and Thomas went on.

He stayed that night with the monks of St. Andrew's in their fine new buildings. In the morning he said mass and office and went to wait upon the King. The King came out from the chapel into the hall where the Archbishop stood to receive him, looked upon him, and went by without a word. Thomas sent a message or two to the King, received short answers, and went back to St. Andrew's.

On the Thursday the Council met. It was composed of ecclesiastics and nobles, who seem to have sat for the most part in different rooms of the castle; the Churchmen with their Primate and the nobles with the King, consulting apart, meeting only now and again.

We know what Thomas expected.

"If I am murdered," he said to the bishops, "I enjoin upon you to lay the interdict upon these districts."

Then the charges were brought; and for three days the Archbishop was set upon and badgered from all sides. On Sunday all men rested; in the evening Thomas was taken ill, and on the Monday could not appear. Then Tuesday dawned.

Thomas rose early as usual, vested for mass in red vestments, and went to the altar of St. Stephen. There he said that mass beginning "Princes sat and spake against me."

At the close he lifted the Blessed Sacrament, placed It in a pyx on his breast; and after his thanksgiving, putting aside his mitre and pall, threw his cloak over his vestments, signed to Llewellyn to take his cross, mounted his horse at the door, and rode to the castle. At the entrance of the hall, as he dismounted, Robert, Bishop of Hereford, advanced from the crowd that was watching, and begged leave to carry his cross. The Archbishop shook his head, took

the cross into his own hand, and went on towards the presence of the King, his bishops gathering round him as he went.

"My lord," said Gilbert of London, in the outer council-room, "you bear your cross like a sword; if the King were to draw his sword, what hope would there be of peace?"

"I bear my cross always," answered Thomas, quietly, "to preserve God's peace. But, as you say, if my Lord the King were to draw his sword there would indeed be no hope of peace."

He passed on and sat down, with Herbert of Bosham at his feet, while the bishops went in to the King.

Now it was unknown what the King would do. On the previous days sentence had been given against Thomas on one or two charges, and he had been condemned to pay enormous sums for his supposed crimes against the King; but now more than this was feared. It was thought by many that imprisonment, or even death, would fall upon the Archbishop. They were violent times; injustice, as well as justice, was short and sharp in execution; a hot word from the King, a

sudden gesture—these might have led in an instant to murder in the castle. Thomas sat almost alone; his men-at-arms had left him; the bishops were running to and fro in terror; his only attendants were half-a-dozen clergy and a terrified company of poor folks and beggars in the street outside, who loved him but could not help him except by their prayers.

So the minutes began to pass. Once Herbert whispered to his master to be prepared to excommunicate any who laid hands on him; but another clerk urged him to take peaceably whatever came. Once the door opened from the inner room where the King sat, and men-at-arms came out with such looks that those round the Saint crossed themselves in terror.

"I fear for you," whispered Thomas to Herbert, "but fear not for yourself. You shall share my crown."

"Not one of us must fear," answered Herbert, smiling. "Are you not the standard bearer of the King of Angels, who were once the standard bearer of the King of Angles?"

Presently Fitz Stephen, who had advised patience just now, leaned forward to speak to his master again, but was hindered by a King's man; so he pointed in silence to the Crucified Figure upon the Archiepiscopal Cross; and so again they waited, while Thomas prayed quietly in his heart.

Then again, after a pause, the door opened, and a group of nobles came out, to demand in the King's name whether Thomas would accept the decision of the Court. The Archbishop answered quietly that the question was an impossible one—that he could not yield to the King except in secular matters, that to charge him with debts from which he had been solemnly released was an injustice, and he ended by appealing to the Pope.

There followed a hesitation. A few of the nobles went back to the King, a few remained eyeing the Archbishop and threatening him in undertones amongst themselves. So the time went on. Bishops came and went from King to Archbishop; some entreated, some threatened, some stood weeping apart. The nobles came again and went

back again; and the crowd gathered and surged. There, in the two rooms were the two pivots round which all turned, the King, apart among his men, and Thomas with his two or three. At any instant violence might break out—there were hot hearts there, and hands ready to strike. That quiet figure that sat beneath the cross was, to many there, the very sign and symbol of all they hated, of God's claim against their own. Finally that figure rose, as the murmuring grew louder.

He had been badgered beyond bearing; he had come there, hoping against hope, desiring justice rather than generosity, and he had not even been allowed to see his accuser face to face. So he spoke his full mind at last.

He was bound, he said, to obey God rather than man; he was the spiritual superior of those who were presuming to judge him, and now in God's name he bade them hold their peace. He appealed to one who was greater than them all, who alone had a right to speak in such matters—the Father of Christendom and the Vicar of Christ; he

placed all in the hands of God and of His Representative.

"And so," he said, "defended by the authority of the Catholic Church and of the Holy See, I go hence."

A chorus of hooting and insult broke out from the crowded hall. He turned on them like a lion, towering above them, his face alight with anger.

"If I were not a priest," he said, "I would appeal to ordeal by arms."

They shrank back as he advanced with blazing eyes through the midst, and on the outskirts a howl went up, calling him traitor and villain. Once again, as he went with FitzStephen and the Cross upraised, he turned on an armed noble who cried out on him:

"If I were but a soldier," he cried again, "my own hands should prove you false."

The great gates of the castle were locked. Behind him surged the howling mob, and from outside came the roaring of the people, who feared that their hero was dead. Even still at any moment he might have been struck down; the tension was acute. A

bunch of keys hung there by the door; the first key that was tried fitted the great lock, and the Archbishop passed out.

* * * * * *

It was a strange dinner that afternoon in Saint Andrew's Monastery. Those who were the Saint's friends had suffered terrible anxiety, and now, even that their master was safe back again the danger was not over. Of those who had ridden in with him to the city scarcely six remained; and the castle, but a few hundred yards away, swarmed with armed men. Before dinner he had prayed awhile in silence before the high altar of the church, replacing no doubt in the hanging tabernacle the Blessed Sacrament which he had carried all day.

Hardly a word had fallen from him, except when FitzStephen had said, "This has been a bitter day."

"The last will be more bitter," said the Saint.

As usual a book was read aloud during the meal. During the reading two bishops came in, sat by the Archbishop, talked a while and went out. They had urged him to

"And the Archbishop passed out." [p. 80

come to terms by yielding some Church lands to the King and Thomas had refused. The reading continued: "When they persecute you in one city, flee to another," read the monk. Thomas glanced up at Herbert and down again.

A little later a couple of men were carrying the Archbishop's bed into the church. There was no concealment about this, and a few minutes later all must have known that the Archbishop feared an attack upon his room. The terror grew even greater when it was known that the King had refused any answer to the bishops who, at Thomas' orders, had asked leave for him to go from Northampton.

In the refectory the company still sat on. The poor who had dined there were gone again; and the windows darkened as the autumn day died. Figures came and went in the gloom of the hall—lay-brothers, monks, bishops, and even King's men; but the tall, silent figure sat on at the table. At last, when night was come, he rose and passed down towards the church.

Those who saw him thought that he in-

tended as before to pass the night in prayer and discipline with his friends; but he shook his head when they asked if they might be present. "Trouble not yourselves," he said, and went on into the church and disappeared behind the high altar where his bed had been placed. A servant remained in sight to warn all comers that the Archbishop was there and must not be disturbed. Then in the choir Compline was sung, in an undertone, that the sleeper might not be awakened; the monks dispersed, and the church was dark.

An hour or two later, in the pouring rain, four men went along the empty streets of Northampton towards the North Gate, outside which waited four horses. One of these men was wrapped in a black cloak, and was a head taller than the rest.

As the dawn broke they were seen again outside Grantham, twenty-five miles away, but now the tall man wore the dress of a lay-brother, and was called Brother Christian: and in the morning it was known in Northampton town that the Archbishop was gone, and three weeks later that he had left England.

IV

EXILE AND RETURN

I

IT is impossible to follow closely all the adventures that the Saint passed through during the next few months, and the endless plottings against him. Yet they were adventures indeed! He had travelled in disguise, both in England and France, seeking a refuge, among others, with the Gilbertines whose holy founder was still alive, hiding now in a cottage in the Fen country, now in a little priest's-chamber built on to a church; he had crossed to France on All Souls' Day, still disguised and known as brother Christian, making his way to Sens where the Pope was at that time. Yet in spite of his care he was recognized again and again, so well known was he, once by his perfect manners, once by his interest in a fine hawk that a falconer was carrying; sometimes he rode with a couple

of friends, sometimes he walked, always passing on to where safety lay.

At one place, for example, a man who was entertaining them noticed that "Brother Christian" was giving away his food to the children and the servants. He looked at him closely, noticing his immense height, his long slender hands, and his fine face. Presently the man slipped out, and returned with his wife, and the two stood looking. When supper was done Brother Christian asked his host to come and sit by him; but he refused, and sat down on the floor instead. Then he burst out.

"My lord, I thank God you are come into my house."

"Why—what is this?" cried Thomas. "Am I not just poor Brother Christian?"

"Whatever you may be called," said the man, "I know very well that you are Archbishop of Canterbury."

But it was more serious when he was within the dominions of the Count of Flanders, from whom he feared he would find opposition. He asked for a safe-conduct from the Count, but the answer was so

mysterious that Thomas saw that mischief was intended, so he slipped quickly across the border before any steps could be taken against him.

It was indeed dangerous in those days of furious politics and quarrellings for an ecclesiastic to incur the anger of any great ruler. England and the Continent were one in religion, and this, while in one sense it made for peace far more than all the "*ententes cordiales*" of our own days, in another sense rendered escape very difficult for any Churchman who was in trouble with the authorities. The visit of a Protestant archbishop to the Continent at the present time causes no disturbance, since no one knows much about him; but Thomas was a great prelate abroad as well as at home; he was a marked man everywhere. All important, therefore, was it for him to know how Louis would receive him. The Kings of England and France were nominally friends, but quarrels were frequent, and it might very well be that Louis might side with his ally.

He was therefore in extraordinary danger

still. The King of England, on hearing of his flight from Northampton, had done his utmost to guard every port in the kingdom, and, now that Thomas had escaped in spite of all, was sending messengers to poison, if it were possible, the minds of Louis, King of France, and of Pope Alexander against the fugitive.

These messages and Thomas' answers, when he reached safety at last, are too complicated to describe at length; but, in a word, Henry accused Thomas of villainy and treachery, and Thomas answered that he had done nothing except defend the rights of the Church. Here is one letter that Henry wrote to Louis:

"To his lord and friend Louis, the illustrious King of France, Henry, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine and Count of Anjou, Greeting and affection.

"Know that Thomas, who was Archbishop of Canterbury, has been publicly judged in my Court by a full Council of the barons of my realm, to be a wicked and perjured traitor against me, and, under the declared name of a traitor, has wrongfully

departed, as my messengers will tell you more fully. Wherefore I entreat you that you do not allow a man infamous for such great crimes and treasons, nor his men, to be in your kingdom. I beg you not to allow this great enemy of mine to receive from you or yours any help or advice; since I would give none, nor would my country, to any enemies of yours within my kingdom. Rather, I beseech you, give your powerful aid to avenge my dishonour on this great enemy of mine, and help me to seek my honour, as you would wish me, if there were need, to do for you.

"Witness: Robert, Earl of Leicester; at Northampton."

We see from this the furious anger of Henry at having been outwitted. It was not enough for him that his "great enemy," once his great friend, had to flee for his life; he must pursue him even in France. But his letter was of no use.

"The *late* Archbishop!" said Louis, questioningly. "Why, who has deposed him? Truly I am a King as much as is the King of England; yet I could not depose

the very least of the clergy in my kingdom."

Louis, at least, understood, as Henry did not, the relations of Church and State, and that no earthly monarch could meddle with the constitution of Christ's Kingdom. When Herbert of Bosham and one or two others, whom Thomas had sent on in front, arrived at Compiègne, where the French King was staying, they were received with open arms; and the next day were informed by the King himself that Thomas was to fear nothing, that France was always happy to give refuge to the persecuted and, above all, to ecclesiastics, and that the Archbishop should have the royal favour and protection. Then followed the decision of the Holy Father.

Pope Alexander was staying at this time at Sens; and, within a few hours of one another, there arrived the three deputations, Thomas' party, Louis', and the mischief-making messengers of Henry. After a private audience or two, a public consistory was held, at which Henry's ambassadors made their accusations against the Saint. Gilbert Foliot, now Thomas' 'determined enemy, opened the attack by a violent

assault upon Thomas' reputation. He waxed very eloquent and scriptural.

"The wicked man fleeth," he cried, "when no man pursueth."

"Have pity!" murmured the Pope, who had a sense of humour.

"Am I to spare him?" cried Gilbert, bewildered.

"No, brother, spare thyself," said Alexander, smiling.

This must have been disconcerting; but the English bishops summoned up their courage and went on. Hilary of Chichester, Roger of York, the Bishop of Exeter, and finally Lord Arundel, made their speeches, and were heard with patience. The Archbishop had been at the very least tactless, they said, if no worse. Let him be sent back to England and the cause properly tried, in the presence of a Papal Legate if necessary. The Pope suggested that since Thomas was near by, the matter might very well be examined at Sens; but the ambassadors shook their heads. It was their business, they said, to demand his return to England. Now the Pope knew very well what this

meant: if Henry could but get the Archbishop in his power he would probably succeed in ruining him. Alexander therefore refused, and the bishops went home again disappointed.

Meanwhile Thomas and Louis had met; and the King had shewn to the exile the greatest affection and confidence. Many other great folks hastened to pay their respects to the Archbishop; and it was finally with a great company of over three hundred horsemen that Thomas rode into Sens at the very hour that Henry's ambassadors were leaving it. Here again his triumph was complete. He had more than one interview with the Pope, at one of which he offered to resign Canterbury into the Supreme Pontiff's hands, but Alexander refused. The Archbishop had been wrong, said the Pope, in ever for one instant having yielded to the Constitutions of Clarendon; but by his stedfastness and courage he had shown himself worthy of his high office. With this the Cardinals agreed; but since, for the present, matters were disturbed in England, it would be best, thought the

Pope, for Thomas to remain quietly in France until some solution were brought about.

To his great joy, therefore, he was advised to settle down quietly in the Cistercian house at Pontigny. It was here that he received from the Pope the Cistercian habit which he wore at the time of his martyrdom. But the King would not even now let him be. Thomas was hardly settled in his cell at Pontigny where he was to join in all the works and prayers of the Community and give himself to study, when a pitiable procession began to arrive from England, men, women, and children, friends of his own, from his estates and palaces, driven out by Henry and compelled to come and shew their misery to their master. This was, perhaps, the meanest thing that Henry ever did, and shews plainly the way in which his character had run downhill since the time when he had called Thomas his friend. Thomas was ready enough to suffer himself, but it was hard to see others suffer for him. He did what he could for his old friends and their families, but he was a poor man himself now and could not do much.

How fierce was Henry at this time in this matter, and indeed how disloyal altogether to the Pope to whom he pretended to appeal, is shown by the orders that he issued to the sheriffs throughout England.

"I command you," he wrote, "that if any ecclesiastic or layman in your district shall appeal to the Roman Court, you shall take him and hold him safely till you know my will: and all the moneys and possessions of the clerks of the Archbishop you shall seize for me, as Randulf de Broc and my other officers shall inform you. And you shall take by sureties the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces of all the clerks that are with the Archbishop, and their chattels, until you know my will upon them."

What that "will" was we have seen—namely, that they should be packed off from house and home and despatched across the sea to Thomas in order if possible to break his heart and spirit by their miseries. The rest, who were left in England, suffered no less: one, a priest, was imprisoned for six months, others were fined; all were insulted

and shunned by those who called themselves the King's friends.

Two years so passed away at Pontigny. It was a strange road along which God had brought His servant—school-boy, student, clerk, Archdeacon, Lord Chancellor, Archbishop, and poor monk. Yet it was what he desired. For the present the Pope told him to live as a private person until the air had cleared a little; and the peace of soul that descended on him was very welcome after the struggles and controversies of the last few years. We know how he spent his time. He lived, so far as his health would allow, the life of a monk; he sang in the choir, he scourged himself, he said mass, meditated and worked in the fields, dressed no longer as a prelate, but as a simple priest; and prepared himself, by a kind of long Retreat, for the crowning test of his life, by which he was to be sealed for ever as a Saint.

Two curious stories told of his life at Pontigny shew that he was beginning even now to see what the end would be.

On one morning the Cistercian abbot was waiting for him in church, hidden behind

a pillar, while the Archbishop was making his thanksgiving after mass at the altar of St. Stephen. All else was silent except for the murmur of prayer from the chapel. Then the abbot thought he heard a voice call a name, twice:

"Thomas, Thomas!"

"Who art thou, Lord?" came the answer, no doubt trembling a little.

"I am Jesus Christ," sounded the voice again. "Thy Lord and thy Brother: My Church shall be glorified in thy blood, and thou shalt be glorified in me."

"God grant it be so, as my Lord hath said," answered the Saint.

Again; on the day that Thomas left Pontigny, the new abbot rode with him on his journey. Thomas seemed silent and cast down: but after a little questioning told what it was that touched him.

He had dreamed the night before that he was in some great church, defending his cause in the presence of Alexander and the Cardinals; and that four soldiers suddenly rushing in on him had attacked him with swords and cut off the tonsured crown of his

head. These stories were kept private at the Saint's command until the prophecies were fulfilled. And now the battle-lines closed.

In December, 1165, the Pope took the first great step towards vindicating Thomas' position in the eyes of the world, and declaring publicly his own regard for him. Here is the letter which he wrote: it reached Thomas in the beginning of the following year.

"Alexander, servant of the servants of God, to his well-beloved brother, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, Health and the Apostolic Benediction.

"The Holy Roman Church is ever wont to surround with the greatest love, to crown with honour and glory those worthy persons whom she knows to be distinguished by prudence, knowledge and virtue. Also, taking account of the devotion and faithfulness, with which you, like an unbreakable pillar, have fought for the Church of God, and considering also the virtue, the knowledge and the excellent wisdom which all see to shine in you, We have thought it Our duty to show Our love for you, distinguished as

you are by so many noble qualities, by honouring you with a special privilege and a singular prerogative, and occupying Ourselves by your interests with Our accustomed goodwill and lively care. It is for this that We are pleased to appoint you legate for all England, except for the diocese of York, in order that in Our name, you may correct what you may find worthy of blame, and that you may, for the glory of God and of the Holy Roman Church, as also for the salvation of souls, establish, build or plant, as there may be need. We advise then and lay upon your Fraternity to do all those things with the wisdom and discretion which God shall give you, to root out vice, and to work for the increase of virtue in the Vineyard of the Lord."

We can imagine how Thomas was cheered by this. The support of the Vicar of Christ was the one thing he needed; and it was the one thing that his enemies feared for him.

"When the apostolic authority commands," wrote Gilbert in dismay to Henry, on hearing the news, "there is neither appeal nor remedy. It is necessary to sub-

mit if one would not incur the reproach of rebellion. On St. Paul's day, while I was at the altar, in London, a man of whom I know nothing handed me a letter from our Lord the Pope, granting and confirming by apostolic authority, the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury as legate of All England, excepting the diocese of York. To us, the bishops of the realm, it is enjoined by the same authority humbly to obey him as legate of the Holy See. . . . Wherefore, prostrate in heart at the feet of your Majesty, we beseech you to cast a look upon us, in the midst of your heavy cares, and to save us from being shamefully brought down to nothing . . ."

So the letter goes on, showing well the dismay that fell upon Thomas' enemies when the Vicar of Christ spoke so courageously on his behalf. It needed courage for Alexander to do this: Christendom was at this time rent by the faction of an Antipope, and it was more than possible, as we shall see presently, that Henry might be tempted in his passion even to go so far as to fall into deliberate schism. But by the mercy of God this did not happen.

Meanwhile, both during Thomas' stay at Pontigny and after his departure for Sens, whither he went in the end of 1166, and where he stayed for four years more, endless controversies and quarrels were raging over his position. Thomas' authority had been ratified emphatically by his appointment as Apostolic Legate; but it was almost impossible for him to exercise it, as his own bishops were rebellious. It is true that they were still in Henry's power and trembled for their lives, but their feebleness and selfishness are beyond all description. Gilbert of London, who had played Thomas such tricks before, was at them again, now omitting the Archbishop's name from the public prayers, and now putting it back again when he thought that a reconciliation would follow. The terror of the bishops was their only excuse; if they had shewn a strong front to Henry it is impossible that he could have gone to such lengths, but their weakness threw all the blame upon the Archbishop, and Henry began to think, and indeed to say, that if Thomas were dead all trouble would be at an end.

It is often so at times of great crisis. A handful is left on God's side, and the crowd is against it. The fire of suffering separates the gold from the dross, and behold! there is ten times as much dross as gold. Yet the speck of gold is more precious than all the rest counted a hundred times over.

During his stay at Pontigny Thomas wrote more than one letter to the English King entreating him to make peace, and to return to his faithfulness as a son of the Holy Church.

"My Lord," he wrote, "the daughter of Sion is held captive in your kingdom . . . Oh, remember what great things God has done for you! Release her, restore her, and take away the reproach from your generation."

And again: "You are my liege-lord, and I owe you my counsel. You are my son in the Spirit, and I am bound to chasten and correct you . . . It is known almost to the whole world with what devotion your Majesty formerly received our Lord the Pope, and what attachment you shewed towards the See of Rome; as also what respect and re-

gard were shown to you in return. Forbear, then, my Lord, as you value your soul, to withdraw from that See its just rights."

But all was useless, Henry saw no more in these letters than further insults; it was intolerable, cried the King, that England's Majesty should be charged with faithlessness and schism! Yet at the very time that these letters were written Henry was actually contemplating withdrawing his allegiance from the true Vicar of Christ, and compelling his bishops to pay their homage instead to the usurper who was claiming the Throne of Peter. Further than this, in discussing the Archbishop's letters publicly, he declared that Thomas would be the ruin of him, body and soul, and complained that none of his servants had sufficient loyalty to rid him of his enemy.

Here, too, is another letter written by Thomas to the King about this time. It is perfectly courteous in expression and substance, and it is also perfectly firm.

"Will my lord be pleased to hear the advice of his friend, the admonition of his bishop, and the reproach of his father? I

entreat my lord in future to have neither company nor business with schismatics, and to bind himself by no alliances with them. All the world knows with what honour and respect you have borne yourself towards the Pope, how you have reverenced and protected the Roman Church, how the Pope and the Church of Rome have had regards and affection for you, and have done their utmost to grant your demands except when they were impossible. Have a fear then, Sir, if you care for your own salvation, that you do not rob that Church, without any pretext, of what belongs to her, and that you do her no injustice. Rather allow to her in your realm the liberty which is hers in all other kingdoms. Remember that at Westminster, when our predecessor gave to you unction and royal consecration, you took and placed upon the altar a written oath to maintain ecclesiastical liberties. Give particularly to the Church of Canterbury which consecrated you, the prosperity and honour which she enjoyed under your predecessors and ours; give back to her entire the lands, the castles, and the possessions which belong

either to the Church or to ourselves, and all that you have distributed to others at your will—in a word, all that has been robbed from our folk, clerks and laics. Allow us to return to our flock in peace and safety, and to fulfil those functions to her which are our right and our duty. So far as we are concerned, we are ready to serve you as our very dear Lord and King, with faithfulness and devotion, with all our power, and in all matters, saving the honour of God, of the Roman Church and of our own Order. If you will not accept these conditions, know that you will not escape the rigours of the Divine Vengeance."

This letter threw the King once more into a furious rage. Thomas spoke no more than the naked truth, and Henry knew it.

Meanwhile the Pope was doing his utmost to bring about peace, supporting Thomas strongly on the one hand, and trying to bring Henry to reason on the other. It was with his approval that the Archbishop, after receiving Legatine powers, published an excommunication against certain notorious enemies of the Church—Randulf de Broc

and Richard de Luci among them—as well as against those who should injure the rights of Canterbury; while for the present he kept back the excommunication of Henry himself.

And so the controversy roared on. Messengers passed to and fro with threatening or conciliatory letters from England to France and back again. Henry stormed and plotted; Thomas prayed and held fast; the Pope and Cardinals attempted to mediate; and bishops and officials did their utmost to keep in with both sides, or threw themselves on the side of Church or King as worldly prudence advised. If Thomas even now had yielded; if he had chosen even to be silent, Henry's anger would no doubt have passed. The Archbishop could have patched up some sort of a reconciliation and gone back to his throne and dignities; but he preferred another throne and a greater dignity.

In November, 1167, another attempt was made to come to terms. The Pope was by now gone back to Italy, but had sent Legates to Sens, who arrived there in this month, to see what could be done. The attempt came

to nothing. One of the Cardinal Legates was an utterly unworthy person, who thought more of peace than of justice, and Thomas soon understood that he could put no trust in him. This Cardinal, William of Pavia, impressed King Louis in the same way. He was one of those courtiers, elegant and polite, who would have been better fitted to serve Henry than the Vicar of Christ. Once more there were consultations. On one side stood Thomas and the King of France; on the other Henry's messengers and the weak bishops; and between them two anxious faced incompetent Cardinals. The attempt ended in a postponement. Henry's party appealed to the Pope; Thomas assented, and the Legates went off. One great man only remained who was faithful to the Archbishop—John of Salisbury, who has left an account of all these negotiations; but of the rest there was scarcely one who was not cowed by the King or set upon his own advancement.

So the months went on; and all Christian Europe was still in a ferment. Messengers went to and from the Pope continually; the

Kings of England and France met in conference after conference; the friends of Thomas more than once went to Henry; but all was useless. Henry, it seems, was willing to give up one or two of the evil old "Constitutions of Clarendon," about which the storm chiefly raged; but this was not enough. It was plain enough to Thomas then, as it is to us now, that Henry was set upon getting the Church under his hand; there were other "customs" which he would not yield, there were Church revenues in his hands which he refused to part with; and it would have been worse than useless for Thomas to return to England on the one hand, or to resign his see on the other. God had raised him up to defend the liberties of the Church, and he could neither yield them nor retire from their defence.

This then, in a few words, was the cause for which Thomas lived and died; it was that the Church of Christ in England might be free from earthly tyranny, and subject only, in matters that concern her life and work, to that authority which Christ Himself placed over her. History has shewn us since, in

England under Henry VIII, in France at the present time, that the powers of the world understand well enough that in this freedom lies the secret of her effectiveness; and that if she can but be separated from Rome, she can be turned this way or that as King and Council shall desire. It was not that Henry II ever seriously imagined for an instant that a Church could remain Catholic apart from unity with the Vicar of Christ; the utmost that he threatened at any time was that he would give his allegiance to the "Antipope" of that day; certainly he had no deliberate programme, as had his namesake four centuries later, of constituting himself Head in the Pope's place—yet it was in that direction that he was moving by his acts and demands; and it was this blind movement that Thomas so clear-sightedly resisted. They seem little things at first sight—these affairs of appeals and taxes and permissions to leave England; it is perfectly easy for a clever and bigoted historian to make them out as trifles about which no "loyal Englishman" need trouble his head; yet to those who understand, as

Thomas understood, that Christ's Church must bow her head to none save Divine Authority in matters that concern her life, years of exile, tears, disappointments, and sorrows, and even life itself, are a small price to pay in such a cause.

But then there fell on him the hardest blow of all. Henry's plots and bribes had reached even the Court of the Pope; his agents had been busy at slander and misrepresentation, and Alexander at last, in despair at getting at the facts, provisionally suspended the Archbishop.

It nearly broke Thomas' heart altogether.

"Oh my father," he wrote, "my soul is in bitterness. The letters by which your Holiness was pleased to suspend me have made me and my unhappy fellow-exiles a very scorn of men and outcasts of the people; and, what grieves me worse, have delivered up God's Church to the will of its enemies." He went on to state his case once more. Indeed it was true, he said, that he desired nothing better than peace: it was not he who had plotted against it, but others.

"We shall soon stand all of us before the

tribunal of Christ, and, by His Majesty and terrible Judgement, I conjure your Holiness, as my father and lord, and as the supreme judge on earth, to do justice to His Church and to myself, against those who seek my life to take it away."

Yet we must not judge Alexander hardly. It was plain that he did not blame Thomas or decide against him: he thought only that to suspend him for a while would give opportunity for wounds to heal and for Henry to recover his balance. He had said, too, to the King that the suspension should only last until the reconciliation was complete; and had named the following Lent to Thomas as the time when this would surely be so.

Then once more an attempt was made to bring it about.

At the beginning of 1169 a conference was held between the two Kings at Montmirail at which Thomas was present; and here, for the first time, Louis seems to have wavered. Hitherto he had been strongly on the Archbishop's side; but the apparent reasonableness of Henry began to shake

him. There was a very moving scene. Thomas came in to the Kings and threw himself at the feet of Henry, worn out with sorrow, yet utterly indomitable.

"Sir," he cried, "have mercy on me! I throw myself on God and your Majesty, for His honour and yours."

Now Henry had been in trouble with Louis on other matters, and for this reason had pretended to be conciliatory towards Thomas, but since these had been now arranged he no longer cared how he behaved. He lifted the kneeling Archbishop with an air of courtesy, and at once began to insult him delicately and shrewdly. How foolish it was, he cried to Louis at his side, that this man should pose as a martyr and a champion of the Church! Indeed he was nothing of the kind; he was only asked to promise to obey the old customs that his predecessors had obeyed; and so on and so forth.

His speech produced a great effect on Louis, who had begun already to wonder whether perhaps he himself had not been wrong in taking Thomas' side. He looked from one to the other.

"My lord," he said, after a pause, to the Archbishop, "do you wish to be more than a saint?"

Then Thomas once more, for the twentieth time, wearily made his answer, showing how Caesar must not encroach upon God's rights; and went out. Henry, fearing perhaps that he had gone too far, once more swore that he meant no harm to the rights of the Church, and that he would gladly reform the Constitutions if they needed it; only, meantime, to save the royal dignity, Thomas must swear to them.

And so once more it went on, Henry professing reasonableness, Thomas appearing unreasonable. It was all useless; and now even among the Archbishop's own friends disloyalty began to show itself. They said they were sick of the phrase "saving the Church's honour"; here was an unequalled opportunity for making peace. Even Louis showed signs of hostility. Yet Thomas stood firm.

And now relief was at hand.

Envoys arrived from the Pope at last, restoring the Archbishop's powers, and, after

Thomas' return to Sens, at last Louis came to himself. A messenger summoned the Archbishop to the King, and as, still ignorant of what was intended, Thomas appeared in his presence, pale and disappointed, Louis threw himself on his knees before him.

"Forgive me, my father," he said. "You alone had clear sight; and we were blind. I offer myself and my kingdom to God and to you, and henceforth, as long as I live, I will not fail you or yours."

II

And now Thomas was free at last to act as he wished; and he acted, as we should expect, with extraordinary courage. Tenderness was of no use; Henry would have mistaken it for weakness. So the Archbishop struck with all his power, using the spiritual sword that the Pope had put into his hands.

On Palm Sunday, 1169, he excommunicated Gilbert of London, Jocelin of Salisbury, and about half-a-dozen more enemies of the Church; and this was followed later by further censures. The excommunicated

behaved as we should expect; they disregarded it, they stormed against it, they appealed to the Pope; they broke out into fury against Thomas. The King was as wild as any of them, for under the censures were included many of his own friends, and even in his chapel, it was said, there was hardly a man who was not in some way under the ban. Even the Pope was doubtful as to whether Thomas' act was wise; but he did not know Henry, and Thomas did.

Matters grew worse and worse. Henry attempted by bribery of officials to bring about the deposition of Thomas. The Pope answered by sending fresh envoys. Henry met these at Domfront, but could prevail nothing. This seems to have sobered him a little, but again he broke out, and nothing in the direction of peace was really accomplished. Then Thomas, with amazing courage, struck again. In September he issued an interdict against all England, to take effect in the following February, unless the King yielded. This interdict was an appalling sentence, forbidding all rites of religion except those practically necessary for salva-

"I throw myself on God and your Majesty, for His honour and yours." [p. 109

tion; every church-bell in England would be silenced, and the Divine Office recited within closed doors. The King struck back fiercely; he threatened furious punishments against all who brought the Archbishop's letters into England; he forced an oath to refuse them upon all officials and great people. Thomas absolved from the oath all who took it; and so the miserable controversy went on. Once a reconciliation seemed probable; Thomas actually met Henry in France, at the King's own express desire, who was now beginning to fear that he had gone too far. The meeting took place at Montmartre, but Henry's behaviour was so shifty and insincere that nothing was finally accomplished. Thomas' own attitude is best shown by the tale that he refused to hurry to the meeting on being told that the two Kings were awaiting him, saying that a priest should always shew a dignified gravity.

This then came to nothing, though Thomas' friends were more than hopeful; and in March, 1170, the King went back, greatly encouraged by the fact that about the same time, owing probably to some misunder-

standing, Gilbert of London succeeded in persuading the Pope to absolve him from Thomas' excommunication.

And now a new matter came up. Henry was anxious that his young son should be crowned before his own death, and seems to have succeeded in winning from the Pope permission that this should be done. But it was the right of the Archbishop of Canterbury to perform the ceremony; and Henry accordingly leapt at this opportunity of humiliating Thomas. In spite of Thomas' protests the coronation took place at Westminster in June, and, instead of the oath always administered to the prince that he should maintain the liberties of the Church, another was used to the effect that the "royal customs" — those very injustices against which Thomas was struggling—must be observed instead. The Archbishop of York, Roger Pont l'Evêque, Thomas' old rival in Theobald's Court, performed the ceremony, justifying himself by the fact that years before, while Canterbury was vacant, the King had obtained the Pope's leave to have his son crowned by any bishop he should

select. A further sign of Roger's defiant attitude was that he availed himself of this old permission, though knowing perfectly well that letters from the Pope revoking it were actually on their way to England, though, owing to the King's attempt to prevent them from arriving in time, they were not delivered until a day or two before the ceremony. There seems to have been a further possible reason for all this haste besides Thomas' humiliation, which the King had in view, and that no less than his intention to get rid of Thomas by violent means. If Henry's son were crowned, the boy would, in a way, be responsible for any crime that his father committed. If Thomas were murdered, that is to say, by Henry, England could not be punished, since Henry was no longer technically its sovereign and representative. Now it is not certain whether Henry did deliberately intend Thomas' murder at this time; his anger came and went like fits of madness; but it is a suspicious fact that at a previous conference with the Pope's envoys Henry had nearly consented to all the terms that were de-

manded of him, but had been resolute in refusing the Kiss of Peace to Thomas—and that, according to the custom of those days, was a very significant thing indeed. This, however, is by the way: for an astonishing thing happened.

In July, after Henry's return to France, another meeting between the Kings was arranged, to see if no reconciliation could be made. The place where they met was afterwards known as Traitor's Meadow, since it was here that Henry succeeded, probably with the design of murder in his heart, in obtaining Thomas' return to England. There was an immense gathering of the two royal courts; and to this gathering came Thomas himself with the Archbishop of Sens. Here an extraordinary scene took place; of which we shall never know in this world the full explanation.

As the Archbishops rode up, with their trains behind them, the King of England leapt off his horse, bared his head, and ran forward as Thomas dismounted, taking his hand warmly and almost kissing him. They talked together for a long while; and later

in the day Thomas in his turn sprang off his horse and knelt before the King. Very tenderly the King bent forward, then himself dismounted, and helped the Archbishop to his horse again.

"My lord," he cried, "what need we say more? Let us renew our old friendship. Only, I entreat you, give me honour before those who look on."

Now it is impossible ever to know whether Henry was sincere. We know that Thomas was, and that he longed with all his heart to be again the friend of his King. It is, at any rate, pleasant to think that even for a few minutes Henry remembered the old friendship, and loved once more this man who had been so faithful both to God and himself.

However that was, the reconciliation seemed complete. Henry solemnly declared that he restored to Thomas all the possessions and rights of which he had deprived him, that all the Archbishop's exiled friends should be allowed to return home; and some sort of amends were made even for the coronation of the Prince. The conference

ended by the King's asking for the Saint's blessing. Yet the Kiss of Peace had not been given.

III

Things now went forward quickly. There were several further meetings between the King and the Archbishop, and, on the whole, matters seemed satisfactory enough, even though the Kiss was still refused. But it seemed that Thomas had no outward cause to complain: the King showed himself very friendly, and allowed him without difficulty to reinstate the clergy and officials of Canterbury in their old positions. Yet the Archbishop was not perfectly happy; nor was the King of France.

"If you will take my advice, my lord," he said to Thomas, "you will not trust yourself in England till you have received the Kiss of Peace."

The Archbishop made a gesture.

"God's Will be done!" he said.

Again, his last words to the Bishop of Paris were that "he was going to England to die"; and to Henry himself he said as much.

"Go in peace," said the King, "I will see you again as soon as I can."

"Sir," said the Archbishop, "my heart tells me we shall never meet again."

The King flushed.

"What! Do you take me for a traitor?"

"No, Sir," said the Saint, quietly.

Then he began to prepare for his final return, to which both the Pope and the King were now urging him.

It is plain what opinion he had by now formed of the King.

"There is no rest," he wrote to William of Sens, "for the soul of the sinner, since the needle of conscience torments him always, and makes him afraid at each moment that the hour of punishment is come. Thus a perpetual anxiety wearies him out; he cherishes suspicions against all the world, even against his best friends, since he thinks he sees in others the traitorousness of which he knows himself to be guilty. Such is the King of England!"

This is severe, but it is perfectly just. It is piteous that Thomas should have been forced to think these things of the man who

had once been his friend, yet later events shewed plainly enough that he was right. And it was with this knowledge of the King's restlessness, of his jealousy, his suspicion, his passionateness, and his tremendous power, that the Archbishop quietly set about preparing for a return to the country where Henry was supreme! If ever any man walked fearlessly and open-eyed to death it was Thomas. Others hoped even while they feared; Thomas neither hoped nor feared.

A little later he wrote to the King as follows:

"He who reads hearts, who judges consciences, and avenges crime, Jesus Christ—He knows with what uprightness of heart and sincere love we have made peace, with the thought that others were treating us in simplicity and good faith. . . . Yet your acts do not witness to this sincerity and good faith. For the restitution which you commanded has been (again) deferred. . . . Who are these counsellors? How have they acted, and in what kind of faith? You could know it very well if you wished to do so.

For our part we think that they have desired to insult the Church, and that they have injured your honour and well-being, except you take swift remedy. . . . And you know, your Majesty, that he who tolerates a fault shares in the guilt of it. . . . Yet, whether we live or die, we are yours always, before God; and, whatever may befall, we beseech Him to pour His blessings upon you and your children."

One of the first things he did was to send on the Pope's excommunication against Gilbert of London and Jocelyn of Salisbury, which had been lifted and then re-enforced by Alexander, sending these letters ahead of him into England for that purpose. He wrote a very touching letter to a nun to whose care he entrusted his message to the Archbishop of York, thinking that a woman would be more likely to convey it in safety through the spies that were set to hinder his correspondence:

"My daughter, a great prize is offered for your labour, remission of sins, a fruit that perisheth not, a crown of glory. . . . The Lady of Mercies will attend upon you,

and will beg her Son, whom she bore for the sins of the world, God and Man, to be the guide, the guard and the companion of your journey. He who burst the bonds of death and curbed the violence of devils is able to check the impious hands that will be raised against you. Farewell, bride of Christ, and ever think upon His Presence that goes with you."

Before Thomas set out for England he received news that the letters had arrived safely. The bishops, with the Archbishop of York, who had been suspended for his crowning of the Prince and the administering of the Constitutions of Clarendon, were on the point of leaving England when these letters arrived.

Thomas then sent on the news that he himself was coming, and, with a great train of horsemen and ecclesiastics, made his way to the coast.

Robert, the Treasurer of Canterbury Cathedral, was sent over first. As a warning of what would follow, he was instantly seized upon landing; charged with having no pass-port from the King, and compelled to

swear that he would return to France immediately.

Everywhere he was welcomed, yet everywhere there was a strange suspiciousness as to what the end would be. There were rumours that the King's soldiers were actually waiting in the port to seize Thomas, if not worse, as soon as he landed. He himself shared in that foreboding. He spoke of his burial-place among his monks; he begged that his body might lie in his own Cathedral church; he hinted that forty days hence some great and terrible event should have happened.

Yet he sailed; and on the afternoon of Tuesday, December 1st, 1170, he landed at Sandwich, his sails filled, as was said, "with the Breath of God," that same harbour where, six years before, he had set out upon his exile.

An extraordinary scene took place on his arrival. As his great boat, with his tall cross in the prow, moved in towards the shore, from all sides the waiting crowds ran down upon the beach.

"Blessed is he that cometh!" went up the

great shout. "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

Blessing them as he went, the Saint passed on into the village; and here, in great haste, there met him a troop of soldiers, sent in speed from Dover by the excommunicated bishops, to demand an explanation. He put them aside, saying that the King knew all. There was another demand or two, and even a threat of violence, but Thomas put these aside also, and, mounting his horse, followed by his train, he rode on towards Canterbury.

From every parish along the six miles that he rode streamed out the people with their priests; from Canterbury itself poured out more crowds, until on all sides of the Archbishop tramped a vast multitude, and from all went up that shout that once welcomed our Lord Himself as He rode to His death in Jerusalem.

"Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!"

As they drew near the city the air was full of sound from the pealing bells; and as the procession came in through the gate and

went along the streets, from every open church-door poured music. The windows were hung with stuffs and banners; the children danced and shouted, the dogs barked; and the poor, who were more to him than all kings and prelates, since they are the friends of Christ, wept and sang to see their father come back. His hair must surely have been streaked with gray, as he rode in, smiling and blessing, on his tall horse, after his six years of exile and pain; but his face, it was said, was alight with joy.

From the Cathedral gates came out his monks to meet him, those old faces which had seen him so many years before, attentive and devout in choir, fatherly and authoritative at throne and altar and pulpit —and the faces, too, of young men and novices who had heard his fame, but had never looked upon him in the flesh. Never was there such a home-coming. He had triumphed at last, it seemed, by his indomitable courage and clear insight, and, as Herbert said to him, "the Church, the spouse of Christ, had triumphed in him." But his greatest triumph was yet to come.

He passed barefooted up the last streets that led to the Cathedral, towering even then above those who walked beside him, passed into those great grey buildings and into the chapter-house, leaving behind him the praying, weeping multitude, that he might be alone with those who knew God as he knew Him. And there, in a hush of silence, he made them a sermon, speaking in that beautiful voice that those who listened had not heard for so long; and, with his ears still ringing with the shouts of the citizens, and his eyes swimming with the sight of that lovely city, he took as his text:

"We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come."

V

PASSION AND DEATH

I

THE last conflict was now at hand, and before it was won there were yet more humiliations to be passed through. Like his Lord, that Lamb of God to whom he was compared after his departure, he had entered his city in meek triumph, and he was moving forward to his cross; yet before he could die, like his Master again, he had to be set at nought, mocked, and rejected.

England was by now fiercely excited. For six years the Archbishop had been in exile, and all men knew the reason. Rumours of every sort were active. It seemed that, unless Henry struck some violent and decisive stroke all his schemes would be in vain, and the Church victorious; and, since there was but one man who stood between the King and success, it needed no great gift of

prophecy to guess that Thomas was in peril. Probably very few people put much trust in Henry's promises, for it was notorious that, in spite of these, the bishops still carried themselves very high and demanded the removal of the sentence under which they lay. It is marvellous that one man could shew so much courage in such danger. Here was Thomas home again, in the very lion's den itself, yet he showed no sign of faltering. He could so easily have made peace. Yet he would not on such terms. Even in smaller matters we see his resolution. Some appointments had been made in the monastery in his absence and without his sanction; and these too he set aside. He was in a position in which most men would have taken every opportunity to make friends and win popularity, but Thomas cared for none of this. He had his duty to God, and he would do it.

On the morning after his arrival messengers from the censured bishops waited upon him in his palace, demanding that the excommunication should be removed. He answered quietly that it was by sentence of

the Pope that they suffered, yet that he would be responsible for their absolution, as Papal Legate, if they would swear to abide the Pope's final judgement. This, after an objection or two, was almost accepted by the bishops; but they still hesitated, and after devising a new plan to humiliate the Archbishop by causing elections to vacant sees to be made without regarding Canterbury's rights, they crossed to France, leaving representatives behind to poison Prince Henry's mind against Thomas during their absence.

This latter plan succeeded perfectly; and when the Archbishop, intending to visit the Prince at Winchester, prepared gifts for him and sent his messengers to announce his coming, they were received roughly. Matters became even worse when Thomas presently went up to London. He was received again as at Canterbury with extraordinary enthusiasm by the people, led by the Bishop of Rochester. For three miles outside the city the roads were thronged; *Te Deums* were sung, and the bells pealed; but the next day a curt order came from the Prince that he

was to return immediately to Canterbury. Thomas did so, accompanied by half-a-dozen soldiers, visiting Harrow on the way, and he arrived home again towards the end of the week before Christmas.

Yet, in spite of the wild welcome with which he was everywhere received, there was a strange foreboding in the air. Curious things were said and done, to be accounted for no doubt partly by the knowledge of many that the Archbishop was still in disfavour. Yet it is difficult altogether to account for them by this explanation. It seems more likely that such an event as the martyrdom of an Archbishop should be allowed, in God's Providence, to cast its dark shadow before.

For example: among all the roars of welcome that met him in London, there was one cry continually uttered by a mad woman in the crowd:

"Archbishop, beware of the knife; beware of the knife."

Again, after his return, when a message was brought to him to look to his safety as well as to the safety of his friends whose lives

were also threatened, he struck himself lightly on the neck.

"Here," he said, "they will find me."

And yet again, while talking to an old friend of his, the Abbot of St. Albans, after telling him what he expected, he ended:

"I go," he said, "to celebrate such a feast in my church as our Lord shall provide." And once more, a poor priest who met him with a gift of relics, and told him a strange story, was bidden to come to Canterbury *four days after Christmas.*

"I will provide for you then," said the Saint.

Finally, a day or two only before his death, a message reached him, uttered some while before by a hermit named Godric, who once before had prophesied his future, and was now dead. "He shall return to his see," the holy man had said, "where not long after an end shall come to him altogether and of all things—an end that shall be to many men a remedy of salvation."

Other signs also shewed the belief of his enemies as to what would happen. The De Brocs, strong King's men, dared to hunt in

his preserves, to steal his hounds, and even to mutilate one of his horses, as if knowing that he could not defend himself. He answered this on Christmas Day by an excommunication, uttered with all his undying courage, against the worst of the offenders.

And so his last week began.

On the Saturday before Christmas he held an ordination in the Cathedral; he passed the following days quietly with his friends, taking up, no doubt, the old life of prayer and devotion that had been so dear to him six years before. Thursday was Christmas Eve; and that night he sang the Nativity Gospel after mattins—that is, the gospel of the generations of our Lord—and the midnight mass. For him the Crib and the Cross were not far separated. He preached at the high mass on Christmas Day, on the text: "In terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis," thinking no doubt much of that peace which he desired, but of which these men of evil will would have nothing.

At one point in his sermon he broke down altogether, as he spoke of the bodies of the martyred Archbishops that lay about him in

the church, and hinted that another might soon lie there too. A murmur of sorrow burst out from the crowd that listened. Then he sang the high mass himself.

On St. Stephen's Day he sent off Herbert of Bosham, and Alexander his cross-bearer who had been with him through all his troubles, with another, sending two of them to the Pope, and Herbert to the Archbishop of Sens. Finally he sent two more of his friends away on business connected with the excommunications that had caused so much trouble.

On St. Stephen's Day, and St. John's, he sang mass in the Cathedral; and on Holy Innocents' Day he received the message from St. Godric that has already been quoted; and heard mass. At midnight he said mattins privately with a few monks and priests; and when that was over stood for a long while looking out into the dark.

Suddenly he turned to his friends, asking what was the hour, and whether it would be possible to reach Sandwich before daybreak. They told him yes; but, seeming still to meditate, he said a few words in a low voice,

as to the doing of God's will, and his own readiness to bear whatever was in store.

Then presently he lay down for his last sleep on earth.

II

While Thomas watched and prayed in Canterbury, in Saltwood Castle, a few miles away, five men also watched, but not to pray. Their names were Randulf de Broc (the owner of the castle and the head of that family which had done so much against the Archbishop), Reginald Fitz-Urse, William de Tracy, Hugh de Morville, and Richard le Breton, King's men and knights.

An account of these men is given by Dean Stanley. Briefly it is as follows. De Morville was the most important of the four strangers. He was a landowner and Justice Itinerant in the North. De Tracy was from the west-country, where he also possessed large estates, and was of royal blood on both sides. Fitz-Urse was descended from a great Norman noble of the time of the Conquest, and also came from the West. Le Breton, too, was of a Norman

family, also settled in the West: he was an intimate friend of Prince William, the King's brother, and was probably related to Gilbert Foliot. It is plain then that all were important persons, and from other points we know that they were in high favour at Court. It is extremely unlikely therefore that they would have acted as they did, unless they were absolutely sure that they were carrying out the King's wishes. This probability is made certain from the fact that although, as will be seen, certain reparations were demanded from them—De Tracy, at least, went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land—yet they do not seem to have lost the King's favour. Within a short while after the tragedy to which we are just coming, they were again continually in the company of Henry, and more than one was appointed to an important position. It is hard to understand this, considering the King's own repentance; and it is only possible to think that Henry, knowing himself really responsible for what happened, did not understand that his friends, who had carried out the crime, should suffer too.

These four, less than a week ago, had been present in Bur Palace, near Bayeux, in the very room where the King was when he received the three censured bishops, and had heard their complaints. "Sir," said Roger of York bitterly, "I am the only one of the three who dares address your Majesty! The rest of us are excommunicate utterly! It is for taking part in the crowning of your son that we suffer. And he that has done this, now that he is home again, marches everywhere with his army! Sir, we think nothing of perpetual vexations, and the distresses which we suffer in your Majesty's cause; but we are losing too our fortune, our dignity and our good name."

"By God's Eyes," shouted the King, "if all are excommunicate who had part in my son's crowning, then am I excommunicate too!"

"Patience, Sir," sneered Roger, "if we cannot check the storm, we can at least submit to it in peace."

"What would you have me do then?" cried the King.

"It is not for us to counsel you," said

Roger smoothly: "that is for your barons to do."

"We shall not have one day of peace," shouted a baron, "so long as Thomas lives."

Then the King had burst out once more into one of his insane fits of anger, and had cried out, again and again, that famous sentence:

"Ah! What sluggish knaves are these of my kingdom! Is there not one that will rid me of this troublesome priest?"

The four knights had looked at one another, slipped out, and after a consultation had separated. And now here they were at Saltwood, together again. The King upon hearing of their departure had, perhaps with a little terror at his heart, sent messengers after them; but it is difficult to know for certain with what intention. In any case they arrived too late.

Early on the morning of Tuesday, December 29th, the four knights, accompanied by the De Brocs and a servant or two, stole out of Saltwood and set out on the road to Canterbury. They entered St. Augustine's

Abbey outside the walls, and were received by Abbot Clarembald, the old enemy of Thomas', who had refused his blessing years before on a trifling plea. This abbey, which three years before had suffered a fire and lost its church with St. Austin's shrine and a large part of its immense library, stood about a hundred yards outside the postern called Queningate to the south-east of Christchurch. There they spent the morning, took some food, and with about a dozen soldiers set out again for the Palace, about a quarter to four o'clock.

The Archbishop dined that day at three o'clock. He had heard Mass in the morning and paid his devotions, as his custom was, at all the altars of the church. Then he had spent a long time in spiritual conversation in the chapter-house, and had made his confession to a monk, Thomas of Maidstone. He had also taken the discipline three times. It was a heavy day, with thunder clouds hanging over the city.

There were a few guests that day at dinner, among whom were Prior Robert of Merton,

his old schoolmaster and confessor, and Edward Grim, a priest from Cambridge. Other friends that were present were John of Salisbury and William FitzStephen; and among the monks two, who afterwards wrote down many of the facts contained in this book, Dom Benedict and Dom Gervase.

He talked pleasantly and ate well that day; and on being congratulated on his good spirits he smiled and answered,

"A man should be cheerful who goes to his Master."

And again, when he received a direct warning that the knights were on their way, he answered that he knew well enough that he would die, but that it would be within the church.

Then, when dinner was over and the poor were admitted to the hall, he went, according to his old custom, to his own room, sat down on the bed, and began to talk.

He had only spoken a few words when footsteps sounded in the passage, and his seneschal looked in. Behind him were the faces of others.

"My lord," said the man, "four of the

King's household knights are here, and desire to speak with you."

"Let them enter," said the Archbishop quietly, and continued to talk.

Then the four knights came in, passed up the room and sat down at the Archbishop's feet without a word. They were in tunics and cloaks, with mail beneath, but they bore no weapons, though they glanced once or twice at the heavy metal cross that stood by the bed.

Presently the Archbishop gave them good-day; but for a moment they gave no answer. Then—

"God keep you!" snarled FitzUrse.

Again there was silence, as Thomas' face flushed at the insulting manner.

"We are come," said FitzUrse brutally, "with the commands of the King. Will you hear them in private, or before all these folk?"

"As you please," said Thomas, softly.

"Nay, as you please," snapped the knight.

Finally the room was cleared; but the instant FitzUrse began to speak of the excommunicated bishops Thomas' face changed.

"There is no need of secrecy for this," he said; and ordered his monks back again. Then FitzUrse poured out a string of accusations.

The Archbishop, he said, had broken his pledge of peace. He had paraded the country with "troops" (this referred to the five soldiers whom Thomas had had for escort during his journey from London). He had dared to excommunicate the bishops for obeying the King's orders. He must go at once to Prince Henry, swear fealty, and make amends for his treason. Finally, he must absolve the bishops instantly.

Thomas expostulated at each point, but it was useless. He explained that the Pope had uttered the censures, and that the Pope must annul them if any must, that he had already attempted to see the Prince and had been refused admittance; and that the King had publicly and notoriously given leave for the punishment of the bishops. He added that FitzUrse himself had been present when the King did so.

"What?" cried the knight, "you accuse the King of treachery?"

"Reginald, Reginald," said the Saint, "I do not accuse the King of treachery. He did it publicly, before you all."

FitzUrse denied it; and together all the knights broke out into oaths, "by God's wounds," that they had borne enough.

The monks were aghast at the violence.

"My lord, my lord," cried John of Salisbury, "let us speak in private!"

"There is no need," said Thomas.

Then for the last time the Archbishop repeated the facts of the case. He held a great trust from God, he said, and he could not betray it for the King's sake; while, on the other side, he was willing to yield all that was possible. But what was he to do? Since his landing in England the safe-conduct given him by Henry had proved no defence against insults and injuries of every kind. And now here were open threats!

"And if there have been injuries," shouted Hugh de Morville, "why do you not complain to the King, instead of excommunicating on your own authority?"

Thomas answered that it was his duty, and no one else's, to defend the rights of

the Church, and that he would do so without shrinking.

Then the fury of the knights broke out indeed. They sprang up from the floor, they gesticulated, they roared out that it was the Archbishop who was threatening now. They abused the Archbishop to his face and defied him. Thomas once more declared his resolution to stand firm; and they rushed towards the door where a great crowd had assembled at the noise. Thomas called after Hugh, but he paid no attention; and all that FitzUrse did was to order the Archbishop's servants to keep their master under guard until the King required him.

"I am easy to keep," said Thomas, as he took a step or two after them. "Here will you find me," he said, and he laid his hand softly upon his own head.

Down into the hall again swept the knights, catching this man and that as they went. FitzNigel, the seneschal, cried up to his master as he was dragged away.

"I see, I see," said Thomas; "but this is their strength and the power of darkness."

Then, with shouts of "King's men!

King's men!" they passed through the court, and the great gates were shut.

The Archbishop went back to his room and sat down in the falling twilight; and there followed a little talk. John thought he had been too sharp with the knights. Thomas smiled.

"I have taken counsel," he said. . . . And again—

"I am ready to die . . . God's Will be done."

Presently a servant rushed in.

"My lord, my lord," he cried, "they are arming."

"What matter?" said Thomas. "Let them arm."

And now from all sides came sounds of confusion; wailing, voices, and footsteps; for the sudden flight of the knights and their shouts of "King's men" and "To arms! to arms!" had told all that trouble was near. Across from the hall below came the sound of running feet as the servants rushed out to find shelter, for the orchard to the west of the Cathedral was crowded with armed

"The Martyrdom of St. Thomas."

men. Close beside this orchard was a long covered passage leading to the south-west door of the cloister, and from this direction came the sound of crashing and breaking, as if some man were seeking entrance that way back into the palace. There was no escape, then, that way, nor into the street now known as Palace Street, for this too, no doubt, was held by the soldiers.

Even in the Archbishop's room by now terror was supreme.

"To the church, to the church!" cried one; and another, that Vespers were being sung, and that the Archbishop should be present.

He was persuaded at last, and passed out of the palace, probably through a side-door behind the hall, of which the moulded arch still remains in the palace to-day, towards one that led into the cloisters at the north-west, even then refusing to move unless his cross went before him. Henry of Auxerre took it, and they went on in the falling dusk. But the door was locked. A monk beat on it in vain. Then from the silence within came running footsteps and voices; the door

was wrenched open by two monks on the inner side, and the little procession went on through the passage between the locutory and the cellary into the cloister; then, past the refectory, turned to the right by the chapter-house, and so, with the Archbishop still bidding his terrified friends to take courage, they came into the dark Cathedral by the north cloister-door.

III

Within, the great dark church was still full of the sound of singing, from where, up the steps and within the choir, the long rows of monks faced one another in their stalls. But all was falling into confusion. A moment ago a couple of boys had burst in crying that the King's men were coming; and even now the nave was filling with the frightened folk from outside, and the sound of shouts and footsteps rang nearer every moment. A few monks sang bravely on at the "Opus Dei"; some hesitated; some ran out and down to the door into the cloister as the archiepiscopal cross came in, followed by the tall figure in black. In an instant

they were crying out to him to make haste and come in, that all might die together.

He bade them go back to their Vespers; and while they still hesitated—

"I will not enter," he said, "so long as you remain."

Then he turned to the press behind him, and asked what they feared.

"Armed men in the cloister!" they cried.

"Then I will go out to them," he said.

The confusion increased, and yet above it all pealed the psalms from the choir, mingled now, it seems, with the thunder of the storm that was breaking over the city. Some entreated him to go into the choir; some began to drag up a great bar to secure the door. Thomas' eyes blazed.

"You cowards!" he cried. "I bid you by holy obedience not to make fast the door. A church is not a castle!"

But the door began to close, and he to be dragged towards the steps that led up into the church. He broke away from their hands.

"Let my people in," he said, and went back to the door to draw in a few who still remained clamouring outside.

"Come in, come in quickly now," he said.

And now through the cloister came the sound of armed feet, and, as the Archbishop drew back a step, still facing the door, there burst in suddenly the four knights, followed by soldiers and a clerk or two; and on the instant up the steps and behind the altars, mad with fear, vanished all Thomas' friends but three. These, still trusting to the dark and the confusion, tried to drag him up the stairs.

"Leave me," he said sharply. "Let God dispose of me as He will."

And then rang out a voice from the knights.

"Move not!" it cried.

(Now the place where Thomas stood was an oblong paved space, one of the north transepts of the church, roofed over with the floor of St. Blaise's chapel above. This floor was supported by a pillar. On the left, looking from this pillar towards the door, was the back of the Mary altar, with the image of our Lady against another pillar close by. In the apse on the right stood St. Bennet's

altar, then, further into the church were two flights of steps, the one leading into the crypt, the other into the choir. On the second flight, a few steps up, stood the Archbishop. Opposite was a window, now all but dark, as the sun had set. There remained with the Archbishop three friends—Prior Robert, William FitzStephen, and Edward Grim, the Cambridge priest; and two or three more, of whom we do not know the names, were by the door.)

"Where is Thomas Beket," cried a furious voice, "the traitor to the King?"

"Where is the Archbishop?" cried Fitz-Urse.

Thomas nodded to the monks behind him, who were still attempting to force him up the steps.

"I am here," he answered, "no traitor, but Archbishop."

He pulled himself free and came down the steps again, followed closely by Grim, appeared round the pillar, and faced his murderers: a little blank wall was behind him, between the altar and the steps down which he had come.

Then some soldier who had come in with the knights ran forward and struck him across the shoulders with the flat of his sword.

"Flee," he cried, "or you are a dead man."

"I will not flee," he said, and so stood.

Then again they cried out on him to absolve the bishops.

"I will do no more than I have said and done," he said. "Oh Reginald, Reginald, I have done you so many kindnesses, and you come against me with arms!"

"You shall soon know it," snarled Fitz-Urse. "Are you not a traitor?"

"I do not fear your threatenings," cried Thomas. "I am ready to die in God's cause. Yet let my people go!"

FitzUrse seized him, knocking off his cap with his sword.

"Come," he cried, "you are my prisoner."

Thomas tore his cloak loose.

"Do with me here what you will."

There followed a struggle. The knights seized him, shrinking even then it seemed from the horror of slaying him in that place,

but, with Grim's help, he clung on to the pillar.

"Do not dare to touch me," he cried, "you are my man, Reginald, and owe me fealty."

"I owe you no fealty nor homage," cried the knight, "contrary to my fealty to the King."

By now faces were looking down from the church above; others, clinging to the altar of St. Bennet close by, were watching also, terrified and bewildered; and the knights, fearing a rescue, drew back an instant from the Saint. Then, with a great crash, Fitz-Urse flung down the axe that he carried.

"Strike! strike!" he shouted.

Thomas, still half reeling from the struggle, bowed his head in his hands in the dying light.

"I commend myself to God, to holy Mary, to blessed Denis, to St. Elphege."

Then down came William de Tracy's sword. Grim, still standing by the pillar, leapt out to avert it with outstretched hands, and met it with his right arm; but the long Norman blade cut half through it, smashing

the bone, then struck the Saint's head and fell upon his shoulder. Grim, dripping with blood, and maddened with pain, sprang aside to the altar; from where, a moment before, a monk, a native of Canterbury, named William, had run out and up the steps, clapping his hands and shouting to warn the rest. (It was this William Fitz-Stephen who had so often been his minister at a more august Sacrifice even than this—his subdeacon at mass.)

Then those who watched saw how the Saint lifted his hand to his head, and as he saw the blood upon it they heard him cry:

"Into thy hands, O Lord, I commit my spirit."

Again a sword rose and fell; but he remained motionless; but at the third blow he fell upon his knees, and sank slowly forward on to his face with joined hands, before St. Bennet's altar; and Grim heard him say:

"For the Name of Jesus, and the defence of the Church, I am ready to die."

Richard le Breton struck the fourth blow as he lay there, shivering his sword upon the pavement, and cutting off the crown of

the Saint's head—as the Saint himself had seen in vision at Pontigny.

"Take that!" shouted Richard as he struck.

Then Hugh Mauclerc, a cleric that had entered with the knights, or as some say one of the knights themselves, stamping, with his foot upon the martyr's neck, probed and tore in the gaping wound, till the brains poured out, giving him thus his Fifth Wound that was needed to mark him Christ's.

"Let us go," he cried, "the traitor is dead; he will rise no more."

And so they ran from the church, crying, "King's men! King's men!"

Then the thunder pealed again overhead; and that night the sky was as red as blood.

VI

CORONATION

SO, as says William, the Norman monk, "ends the Passion of the glorious Martyr Thomas, on the fourth day before the Kalends of January.

"He suffered on this day, who was Primate and Legate, in the Church and on behalf of the Church, about the hour of the evening prayer, while the choir of monks sang psalms round about, and the clergy and the company of the people stood by, and while reigned our Lord Jesu Christ to whom be honour for ever and ever. Amen."

"Nor," he says again, referring to the white brains and the pool of blood that lay before the altar, "were roses and lilies wanting to his death."

"So," says another writer, "our high priest, not without blood, entered into the Holy Place."

For an hour or so after Thomas' soul

was gone to God his tall body lay stretched there in the dark transept—at the foot of St. Bennet's altar. And then they came with lights, weeping and wailing—Osbert, his chamberlain, first veiling the wounded head —and lifted it on to a bier.

The face was as if he slept; those great eyes closed, and the colour fresh on the cheeks. His head was crowned with his own blood, and one streak ran across the face. While they made ready, binding up the wound, and arranging the body, more and more of the monks and people crowded in, dipping handkerchiefs in the precious blood, filling little phials from the great pool before the altar, crossing themselves with it, and invoking his name. The body lay all night before the high altar; and it was here that his confessor, old Prior Robert, shewed the brethren for the first time what manner of man this had been. There, next the tender skin, extending even down his thighs, lay the cruel hair shirt that marked him as a penitent and a lover of the Crucified.

Then, even on that day, the miracles began.

It was an uncritical age; that is to say, it was a time when men thought it natural that a God who had made the world and sustained it by His Power should shew that Power round the lives and deaths of His greatest servants. I do not say that every one of the five hundred marvels attributed to St. Thomas' intercession was inevitably a miracle; but I do say, with my whole heart, that many of them were, and that they were in accordance with what our Lord Himself promised as to the signs that should follow them that believe.

For example: on the same night a paralytic woman, drinking a little water in which a dried drop or two of the martyr's blood had been dissolved, was restored to health. A day or two later a blind woman who invoked his name received her sight. On the Saturday a girl of sixteen, living in Gloucester, was cured of a disease of eleven years' standing, upon her mother's making a vow to visit the shrine of the Saint.

And so the miracles went on. The Christian world went wild with enthusiasm, as is proper when a saint goes to God by the

road of blood. Faith was kindled, and God rewarded it according to His promise. Devotions sprang up; pilgrimages began; men returned from Canterbury bearing little leaden phials filled with "St. Thomas' water"—that is, water in which a minute drop of the holy blood had been mixed; and the shrine of Canterbury began to take its place with the great centres of the world's devotion—with Rome, Jerusalem, and Compostella. Still the fame increased. Even Gilbert of London, once his friend and lately his enemy, was healed of disease by a drop or two of "Thomas' water"; as Henry himself, a little later, when his sons rebelled against him, gained the upper hand, as he himself confesses, through the intercession of the Saint whom he had done to death. On the Continent altars were dedicated in his honour; and particularly worthy of notice is one little chapel in Notre Dame de Fourvières at Lyons which the Saint himself, years before, had been asked to consecrate. He had consecrated the rest of the church, but, upon being asked to name a saint for this chapel, had refused,

saying it must be kept for the honour of the next martyr that should die. That honour was his own, and the chapel was dedicated to himself. Again, in England especially, there now began, and continued for many centuries, the custom of choosing Tuesdays for the saying of votive masses of St. Thomas, since it was on Tuesday that his first and second Birthdays fell—that on which he came into the world, and that on which he went to God; it was on Tuesday that he faced Henry at Northampton, and landed again in England after his six years' exile. And it was almost immediately after his death that he began to be considered the Patron of Secular Clergy, since he was one himself, and it was for their rights that he lived and died—a position which he now holds by the authority of the Supreme Pontiff.

So his fame increased.

Persons in all parts of Europe in great need vowed a candle of so many pounds' weight to be burned by the body of the martyr. Little by little as the years went by a shrine rose behind the high altar, of which the traces can be seen even to this day.

Kings and prelates poured in gifts; the shrine became covered with plates of gold, rich with jewels. The "Regal" of France, a huge ruby, given by the French King, shone there for centuries until the bitter day when another Henry, stripping the shrine for "his own use," carted away the jewels and gold in a string of carts, and set the gem in a ring upon his own thumb. Yet within that shrine for nearly four centuries lay that which was more precious than all jewels, vested in the robes of his consecration,—the body of the martyr himself.

On the Continent an equal devotion sprang up to the Saint who had spent his exile there; and many places in Flanders claimed the honour of having had visits from St. Thomas in his lifetime, some of which are very hard to establish. Vestments which he had worn at the altar were preserved as holy relics, inscriptions were put up to record that in this or that place he had stayed or said Mass; in one place even a wooden cup was kept from which it was reported that he had once drunk. So, too, in France and Belgium and Italy there were shown many relics and

memorials of the martyr; the picture of his passion was worked on many vestments; a part of his brain and his blood-stained dress are preserved in the great Church of St. Mary Major in Rome; but of course, for the most part, his relics never left England. In countless abbeys and churches were kept tiny fragments of his dress, his hair shirt, his Pallium, and even his knife and boots. These nearly all disappeared in the storm of the Reformation, and can never be recovered; even those that were preserved in his own shrine at Canterbury vanished under the hands of Henry VIII. All this eagerness, however, abroad as well as at home, to claim some share in the martyr, shows what an immense impression his death made upon Christendom. There was no shadow of doubt in men's minds that here was one who was a martyr as fully as any martyr of the Catacombs and the Roman persecutions —one who had died as surely for the cause of Christ, though at the hands of a Christian King, as any who died under Nero or Diocletian. It is wiser surely even for Protestants to take the opinion of the age in

"The King remained before the tomb all night, bleeding and travel-stained."

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which he lived, than of an age when Christian principles are so marvellously misunderstood, and to acknowledge that at least he died unselfishly and nobly on behalf of a cause which he was fully convinced was that of God. Catholics do not need such arguments: it is enough for them that the Church has raised him to her altars.

To return then to our history.

Henry was at Argentan, in France, when the news came to him of what his own passionate words had wrought. Instantly he retired from the world for forty days, fasting and afflicting himself. "Oh! that it should have happened! Oh! that it should have happened!" he cried out over and over again. So, too, for eight days Pope Alexander went into retirement, forbidding any member of the English nation to be admitted into his presence.

Henry's grief was certainly sincere. It is true he made no great difference in his treatment of the Church; but at least his sorrow for the death of his friend and his share in the murder was deep and lasting.

In the following summer he undertook his own penitential pilgrimage to the shrine, after seven months' exclusion from all churches and sacred rites.

Upon his landing at Southampton he began to fast on bread and water, and for four days rode so, avoiding the crowds, but praying outside the churches as he went. When he first caught sight of Canterbury and the great golden four-winged angel that rose on the central tower he dismounted. At St. Dunstan's Church outside the walls he stripped off his shoes and went barefoot over the sharp stones till his feet dripped with blood. Then after a public acknowledgement of his sin before the tomb in the crypt, in the presence of the bishops, in the great church, still "unreconciled," with its bare altars and its penitential silence, he bent down his head, and, throwing back his cloak and shirt, received from each prelate five strokes on his bare shoulders, and from each of the eighty monks three. Then, still kneeling on the stones, he remained before the tomb all night, bleeding and travel-stained.

The four knights, too, did their penances. One of them, it is said, William de Tracy, went on pilgrimage to Rome and Jerusalem, and built a church in Devonshire, that still bears his name, in reparation of his crimes. For they had added crime to crime. After their double sacrilege in killing a priest in a House of God they had sacked his palace, carrying away for their own reward a great knife of the Saint's, his ring, his chalice; robbing his stables of their horses, and his treasury of stuffs and jewels designed for the service of God. They found, too, to their shame rather than to their joy, two of the hair shirts he was accustomed to wear. For months no man would speak to them or eat with them; even the dogs, it is said, turned away from the remnants of their masters' food. The loathing that men had for their crime was shown by the bitter punning upon their names: Fitz-Urse was named Ursus, the "Bear"; Hugh de Morville "of the Town of Death"; De Tracy became "Thraso"; and Brito "Brutus." It was said of those who assisted them that many died violent and terrible deaths, and scarcely one received

the Last Sacraments before he went to God. It is even said, by persons alive now, that in the gatehouse of Malling Abbey, where one at least came on the night of the murder, there is still heard the sound of feet going up and down, and up and down, as if some restless soul were there that cannot lie still nor sleep.

Of those who were the Saint's especial friends other strange stories are told. For almost a year after the martyrdom the arm of Edward Grim, wounded in the Martyr's defence, remained unhealed. Then one night, in dream or vision, Thomas stood by him, and, taking his arm, wrapped it in a linen cloth, wet with the famous "water."

"Go, you are healed!" said the apparition.

"And this is the arm itself," writes Grim, "the hand of which has written these things for you to read."

On the night of the martyrdom a monk, sleeping in the crypt beside the body, saw the Saint himself enter in red vestments, bearing a lighted censer; he saw him mount the steps of one of the two altars and say mass there, censing both the altar and his

own tomb. To others the Saint appeared, bearing still the streak of blood across his face, as it had been at his death.

To Benedict he appeared three times on successive nights, "white and ruddy," going to the altar.

"My lord, art thou not dead?" he cried on the third night.

"I was dead, but am alive again," said the figure.

"If thou art alive," said Benedict trembling, "and amongst the martyrs, why dost thou not shew thyself to the world?"

"I bear a light," said the figure, "but it is not seen for the cloud that is between."

Herbert of Bosham, too, relates a wonderful story.

A monk in the Holy Land, dying about the day on which the Saint was martyred, promised to his Superior that, if it were permitted, he would appear to him and tell him of his condition. Nothing was of course known at that time of the event at Canterbury. A few days later the monk appeared to the Abbot and told him how, when he was admitted to the presence of God, he saw

come into that same Presence a man named Thomas, wounded in the head, led by a multitude of saints and angels. He saw that Saint crowned, and heard the welcome that he received.

"Thomas," said our Lord, "thus oughtest thou enter into the Courts of thy Lord. The glory that I have given to Peter, the same will I give to thee."

And this, said the monk, was Thomas, Bishop of Canterbury, dead in those days and gone to God.

This story was told to Herbert by the Patriarch of Jerusalem fourteen years after the event.

So then lived and died Thomas, who reigns with Christ. "So our Abel, made perfect in the glory of martyrdom, fulfilled many times in a short space."

The priest who has written this book has written it at Cambridge whence came Edward Grim. In the Church of our Lady and the English martyrs that now stands at Cambridge there is, as there ought to be, an altar to St. Thomas, Bishop and Martyr, and

above it is a window presenting his martyrdom, and Edward Grim standing beside the Saint, with outstretched hand to receive the first blow. Six miles away, in the little Church of Hauxton, now in Protestant hands, there is still shown upon the eastern wall of the south aisle a fresco, representing St. Thomas in pontifical vestments above the spot where his altar once stood.

Finally, the monk of St. Bennet who edits this book is a monk of St. Thomas' Abbey at Erdington, where are preserved to this day great and precious relics of the Saint's body, and the amice which he wore around his neck at Holy Mass.

Help us, then *we say with Henry*, O Martyr of Christ! Saint Thomas assist us!

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